

1-1-2018

# Narrative-Based Visual Theology for Oral Learning Pastor Training

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## Recommended Citation

Neu, Raymond, "Narrative-Based Visual Theology for Oral Learning Pastor Training" (2018). *Doctor of Ministry*. 256.  
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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

NARRATIVE-BASED VISUAL THEOLOGY FOR  
ORAL LEARNING PASTOR TRAINING

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

RAYMOND NEU

PORTLAND, OREGON

MARCH 2018

Portland Seminary  
George Fox University  
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Raymond Neu

has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on February 28, 2018  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies.

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Holy Bible, *New American Standard Bible*, La Habra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 2011.  
Holy Bible, *New International Version*, USA: Biblica, 2011.  
Holy Bible, *New Living Translation*, Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013.



## Dedication

Dedicated to all those to whom God sent His most important message  
yet who did not have the skill or opportunity to read it.  
You were never required to *read* it; only to hear and obey.

And to those who will share the sacred stories with them,  
may we speak, sing, draw, dramatize and dance so they will understand.

Dedicated also to my wife, Becki, who has cheered, cajoled, reminded, encouraged,  
challenged and loved me through this entire process and continues to do so,  
for the sake of those who have not yet heard His stories.  
I love you.

“Faith comes by *hearing* and *hearing* by the word of Christ.”  
Romans 10:17 (NASB)

"Blessed...are those who *hear* the word of God and *obey* it."  
Luke 11:28 (NIV)

“Jesus used many similar stories and illustrations to teach the people as much as they  
could understand. In fact, in his public ministry he never taught without using parables;  
but afterward, when he was alone with his disciples, he explained everything to them.”  
Mark 4:33-34 (NLT)

May you be blessed in your *hearing* of His stories;  
May you be blessed in your *obedience* to His stories;  
May you be blessed as *tellers* of His stories,  
For that is why you were called and chosen.

Ray Neu

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## PREFACE

Deep in the humid jungle of southern Belize, local pastors would faithfully gather and politely listen as this ‘Gringo’ professor did his best to teach them all the good things a pastor should know. After years of going on missions’ trips to Belize, I had become quite familiar with the people and culture, so much so that it made it an easy transition when my wife and I moved there for a five-year stint as the local extension education professor. I was teaching people in a known language, in a culture I was familiar with, with content I knew well and was proficient in teaching. I was using what I thought were relatively clear illustrations, at an assumed appropriate level of English. I was even asking for feedback as to their understanding, doing all the good things a teacher should do. Until that day...the day I learned that I was failing miserably!

What did I learn? Knowing the language is not the same as knowing the proper way to teach. Teaching should be presented in the way the students, in this case, adult pastors, prefer to learn. Knowing something of the culture does not mean that the knowledge will be applied properly in all situations. Knowing the content does not necessarily equate to knowing the best way to present the content. Wisdom cannot be obtained without a thorough transfer of knowledge. Knowledge cannot be transferred successfully if it is not understood properly, which includes the abilities to receive, retain and integrate that knowledge. I learned that relatively clear illustrations only exist in my mind; that without proving that the receptors can understand and restate the illustration and its purpose, it was just a meaningless story. I learned that I had no idea what the appropriate level of English was and that my questions seeking to know if the students understood me, were asked in the wrong way. Their culture dictates that they will always

honor and appreciate a visiting preacher or teacher, whether they understand anything he says or not. Whenever I asked, ‘Do you understand?’ all heads nodded affirmatively because that was the cultural response. I would find out later; they had almost no clue what I was saying.

The painful realization came when I asked them to turn in a take home test from two weeks prior. No one moved. When I persisted, they all stared at the floor. I waited. Finally, a woman spoke up, “Brother, there were some words we did not understand.” “Okay,” I said, eager to fix the now identified problem, “Just tell me what you did not understand.”

In the first of the four questions, they did not know the word ‘important.’ My heart sank as I knew that in the second question I had used the word ‘significant.’ This was repeated for each question as there was at least one word in each which they did not understand. After some discussion, I asked if they would be interested in having an English language class. This was met with great enthusiasm, so the next week I brought my wife back. Becki is a very thorough homeschooling grandma who brought along some third and fourth grade readers. After an hour of speaking with the group, listening carefully and assessing, Becki asked each one to indicate on the blackboard how many of her words they understood that morning. On a written numeric scale of zero to ten, they each marked their answers, which were consistently at seven to eight.

Then, my wife, who loves me and supports me, did the most unbelievable thing. She asked the group this question, “Now, not for today, but when Pastor Ray is teaching, how many of his words do you understand?” One by one they indicated on the scale the

sad, sad truth that they only understood two to three out of every ten of my words. I wanted to cry. I immediately realized that this was my problem to fix.

This led me on a journey for which I am most grateful. In seeking better ways to teach the Mayan, Kekchi, Hispanic and Creole students in front of me, I learned to communicate in ways that truly made a difference. Together, we found that interactive oral storytelling with discussion was incredibly beneficial. Not only were the students able to understand me, but they also were able to easily recall the material and capably use it in their villages and ministries. The other very significant difference was that this experience changed me – forever. My poor habits of assuming that I was communicating properly have been corrected by those who may be much less literate but are also much better versed in alternative literacies and oralities. Their needs and our discoveries and successes together compel this paper and the journey it invites us all to embrace.

## ABSTRACT

In the realms of popular education, literates hold the day, yet they are not the majority. Even in our highly-advanced world, non-literates or oral communicators, still comprise the largest class of potential learners awaiting an education. The problems they face are complicated and challenging. Physical and financial access to education stop most oral communicators before they even start. If they had access to a local educational institution, more massive hurdles await, including literacy itself followed closely by lack of attention to the learning styles of oral learners.

Yet there is hope. When educators determine to address the unique needs and challenges faced by the non-literate world majority, new schemas arise. This paper examines some of those efforts while focusing on one segment of oral societies, those individuals in spiritual leadership, pastors. Oral learning pastors bear the significant burden of providing spiritual guidance in a field where this knowledge is usually gained through literate means.

I will offer a clear explanation of the problems faced by these leaders, what means and methods have been attempted to reach them in the past as well as more recent efforts to address more appropriate andragogic methods. This paper will explore learning style preferences for oral communicators while giving attention to field tested methods examined in the last thirty years. A review of ancient oral communications brought into modern practice will demonstrate effective models of verbal and visual teaching and learning. An emphasis on theological accuracy and reproducibility will present compelling evidence that oral learners represent the largest untapped resource of the global church.



## SECTION 1:

### ORAL LEARNERS: A PREDOMINANT GLOBAL REALITY

Sunil is a former Hindu. His reason for living has been rearranged through a simple answer to a very specific prayer! Jesus has become real, elevated Himself over all of the other family gods and transformed Sunil's life. Now, Sunil's greatest desire is to continue to lead the small group of friends who are joining in his growing faith. Unable to read, he struggles to know what to tell them. While in the market, Sunil overhears a preacher on the radio. This man and his message must be important since he is on the radio. He pretends to be examining some of the goods in the stall while listening diligently. Sunil hears the preacher yelling "HOLINESS IS WEARING WHITE CLOTHES!" Sunil is overjoyed to have received a message that he can share with his group. He now plans to stop at a tailor shop on the way home.

While this story is hopefully not true, it is representative of the realities faced by oral learners as many such scenarios play themselves out every day around our world. Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism reported in 2004 that there were more than four billion people who either cannot, do not or prefer not to read.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Grant Lovejoy's research suggests "5.7 billion people in the world are oral communicators because either they are illiterate, or their reading comprehension is inadequate."<sup>2</sup> Who are these people? What are the circumstances of their lives? Are they really that much different than

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<sup>1</sup> David Claydon, ed., Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 54, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*, 2004, accessed February 6, 2018, [http://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP54\\_IG25.pdf](http://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP54_IG25.pdf), 22.

<sup>2</sup> Grant Lovejoy, "The Extent of Orality: 2012 Update 1," 2012, accessed February 6, 2018, <https://orality.imb.org/files/1/1255/Lovejoy--Extent%20of%20Orality%202012.pdf>.

everyone else, simply lacking the ability to read? What significant differences are there between oral learners and literate learners? Are these the only two categories in which all people may be classified? We will explore these distinctions and their impacts in social, educational and spiritual dimensions. Specifically, we will explore the impact on oral learners who desire to serve as pastors or spiritual leaders in communities without the aids of literate sources of education.

What is oral learning or orality, as it is often called? “Orality is thought and verbal expression in societies where the technologies of literacy, especially writing and print, are not familiar to most of the population.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Who and Where Are Most of the Oral Learners?**

All people are oral learners, though not everyone is also a literate learner. That is to say that, with the exception of those who cannot speak or do not learn through speech, that nearly everyone who can speak is an oral learner. It is among our first experiences as children, the sounds which we begin to imitate which surround us and inform our world. In general, the majority of oral learners today are such due to a lack of education. They have not had access to or opportunity to be taught to read and write. Some are in this condition because their language has no written code. Most of those who do not read and lacked opportunity are found in developing nations. Their life situation either from personal poverty or governmental lack of provision did not include literate education.

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Madinger, ed., “Oralities & Literacies – Communicating Christ Among Oral Cultures,” International Orality Network, 2012, accessed February 6, 2018, 42, <https://orality.net/content/oralities-literacies-chapter-9-communicating-christ-among-oral-cultures/>.

The majority of these developing nations are found in the Global South<sup>4</sup>, portions of Africa, parts of Asia, India and the Middle East.<sup>5</sup>

*What Are the Circumstances of Their Lives?*

Oral learners are disadvantaged in situations requiring literacy. They are advantaged in situations not requiring literacy. Some would suggest that they are not disadvantaged within their own social systems, but only when they interact with literates. Yet, is this true in all circumstances? Are there not times of economic upheaval, health challenges, manmade or natural disasters in which non-literates are at disadvantages? If this is true, what cooperative efforts exist between literate and oral communicators? Literacy programs, health initiatives, economic and political initiatives and quantum leaps in telecommunications are some of the steps which have been taken to bridge the communication gap in instances requiring literacy. Our first example comes from the political realm:

In 2003, Pete McLain and Charles Madinger were early employees at an NGO startup called Voice for Humanity. VFH had invented a digital audio player which was used in the first free and fair democratic elections in the country of Afghanistan, where most of the population could not read. They worked with locals in Afghanistan to produce and record 16 hours of stories, songs and dramas in 8 languages. These recordings were loaded onto 68,000 digital audio players for people to listen to in small groups. These groups discussed the recordings and were better able to grasp the principles that would make democracy work in their country. Over 6 months, 3 million people heard these recordings and the impact on the elections was unmistakably positive.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Global South,” accessed February 7, 2018, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global\\_South](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_South).

<sup>5</sup> European Community Development Assistance Committee, *Organisation For Economic Co-Operation And Development*, I-99, accessed February 7, 2018, [www.oecd.org/development/peer-reviews/1935386.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/development/peer-reviews/1935386.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Voice for Humanity, “Our Story,” Spoken, accessed February 7, 2018, <http://spoken.org/our-story/>.

This initiative demonstrates the unique opportunities which can develop when creative literates are faced with opportunities and challenges among oral communicators. In many countries where oral communicators are prevalent, there are additional infrastructure challenges as well. Telecommunications is a major consideration in many countries. The advance of cellular service models has been beneficial as expensive landlines no longer need to be installed.

Another example of how technology can be used to help bridge the communication gap between literates and oral communicators is found in healthcare. Qualitative research was conducted in Mpumalanga, South Africa in 2014 examining the use of mobile phones in regard to healthcare information and services in low-resourced settings. “This study investigated the use of mobile phones among patients with chronic diseases, pregnant women, and health workers to enhance primary healthcare in rural South Africa.”<sup>7</sup>

We found that some health workers and patients used their own mobile phones for healthcare, bearing the cost themselves. Patients used their mobile phones to remind themselves to take medication or attend their clinic visits, and they appreciated receiving voice call reminders. Some patients and health workers accessed websites and used social media to gather health information but lacked web search strategies. The use of the websites and social media was intermittent due to lack of financial ability to afford airtime among these patients and health workers. Many did not know what to search for and where to search. Doctors have developed their own informal mobile health solutions in response to their work needs and lack of resources due to their rurality.<sup>8</sup>

Once again, the innovative uses of technology are assisting in ways that offer tremendous assistance to those who are disadvantaged in some ways. While mobile phones are

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<sup>7</sup> Donald W. Light, Review Essay: “Doctors Without Borders: Humanitarian Quests, Impossible Dreams of Médecins Sans Frontières,” Renee C. Fox, *Social Science & Medicine* 198 (2014): 140.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 139.

helping, they also present additional challenges, as heard from the next two patients who were interviewed, a young pregnant woman and an elderly woman:

“When I go to Google, I will write a question and then the answer will come out. I choose any answer, then read it.” Many patients and health workers repeatedly suggested that they were unsure of where to search for the information they required. Patients also discussed their inability to read or understand websites written in English.<sup>9</sup>

I prefer Shangaan because it's my mother tongue and there are other words that I will not understand if it is in English.<sup>10</sup>

Access to available information is good, if it can be found, is reliable and can be understood. When inaccessible, due to cost, unreliable due to incorrect, non-vetted information or simply because it is written or written in an unknown language, it is much less beneficial. In discussing potential solutions and needs, the survey stated: “The bottom-up use of mobile phones has been evolving to fill the gaps to augment primary care services in South Africa; however, barriers to access remain, such as poor digital infrastructure and low digital literacy.”<sup>11</sup> The advantages of such technology as aids between literates and oral communicators are becoming more evident, yet large portions of our world are still cut off from being connected. However, that too is changing.

### *“Big Business” is Not Unaware of Their Plight*

O3b is an effort to reach the ‘Other 3 Billion’ people who are beyond the regular reach of cellular service for phones or internet. Greg Wyler founded O3b Networks

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 145.

Limited in 2007 with a view to creating a global satellite system capable of providing cell and internet service to those places on the earth yet to be reached. SES invested heavily into this effort, contracting with Boeing Satellite Systems International to literally blanket the world with internet signals “to provide internet access to the ‘Other 3 Billion’ in the world who have been left out because they’re too remote or too poor to get connected.”<sup>12</sup> What is the effective reach of these satellites? “The seven mPower satellites will cover 400 million kilometers. Collar said the goal will be for the system to eventually reach any point on Earth.”<sup>13</sup>

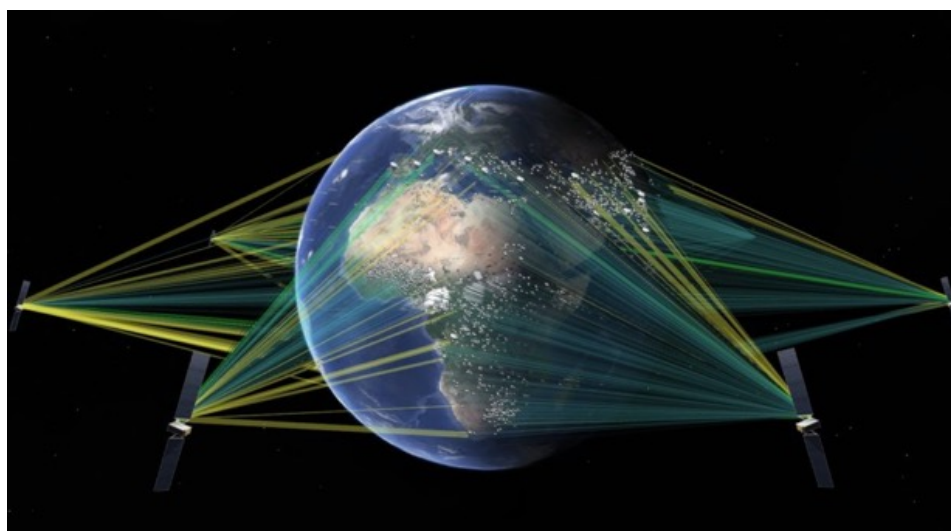


Figure 1:  
Artist's Rendition of SES Network's O3b mPower Constellation. Credit: SES

International Telecommunications Union is just one company who is leveraging these emerging technological advances to create opportunities all over the globe. ITU's website, which demonstrates one aspect of their diversity by being

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<sup>12</sup> Alan Boyle, "Boeing to Build Seven 'Super-Powered' Satellites for SES' O3b Broadband Network," September 11, 2017, accessed January 31, 2018, <https://www.geekwire.com/2017/boeing-mpower-satellite-ses-o3b/>.

<sup>13</sup> Caleb Henry, "SES Building a 10-terabit O3b 'mPower' Constellation," September 11, 2017, accessed February 6, 2018, <http://spacenews.com/ses-building-a-10-terabit-o3b-mpower-constellation/>.

available in six languages, lists two hundred and thirty-five global projects assisting in a wide variety of initiatives. Many of these projects benefit those who are on the outer edges of society.

In any good race, there is more than one runner. Such is the case in the global internet provider race as well. Another contender is Google, whose ‘Loon Balloons’ approach the situation in a slightly different manner. During devastating flooding in Peru and the hurricane which obliterated Puerto Rico, Google’s Project Loon was able to place special weather balloons high into the stratosphere while providing internet for the countries who lost their infrastructure. “More than one hundred sixty GB of data has been sent to people over a combined area of forty thousand square kilometers—that’s roughly the size of Switzerland—and enough data to send and receive around thirty million WhatsApp messages, or two million emails.”<sup>14</sup>



Figure 2:  
Image Credit: Google/X Company, Project Loon

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<sup>14</sup> Loon Balloons, “And the 2016 Golden Balloon Goes to...” Google, December 20, 2016, accessed January 31, 2018, <https://plus.google.com/ProjectLoon/posts/2vGeQAXF4Qo>.

What do all of these technological marvels have to do with oral learners? Simple. Oral learners live primarily in the same areas these companies are working so diligently to reach. Opportunity will soon be knocking or ringing through their phones. Will this be true for all oral learners who have a phone? Let's recall that one use of phones is for oral communication. Being connected to others who can share information about healthcare, food and work availability can be very valuable for those who have been previously isolated. Yet, not all oral learners are the same. Some have limited capacity to understand written words which opens another realm of possibilities for them; namely, texts and short messages, such as those used in WhatsApp and other digital and social media. Another opportunity for this increasing communication horizon is visual communications through video, emojis and symbols.

### **Distinctions Between Literate and Oral Learners**

Do all literates communicate at the same level or in the same manner? Do all oral communicators understand each other equally well? What about when literates and oral learners attempt to communicate with each other? Certainly, there are challenges and limitations when considering written communication. Is this the same for visual, verbal or symbols? "Measuring literacy is not just a matter of saying who can read and who cannot. Literacy skills are needed at many different levels, from writing one's name on a form, to understanding instructions on a medicine bottle, to the ability to learn from reading books."<sup>15</sup> Until they are made aware of the differences, many people believe that spoken

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<sup>15</sup> Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, accessed January 31, 2018, <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/literacy-assessment-and-monitoring-programme-lamp-information-brochure-en.pdf>.



communication works equally well in any circumstance since it does not rely on someone else's ability to read. Many ministries accept the posted literacy rates of foreign countries without realizing that there are a wide variety of definitions for 'literate.'

Christian groups who unwittingly accept governments' literacy statistics at face value are likely to perpetuate a tragic mistake. They will believe that the people to whom they minister are more literate than they actually are. They will continue to train their workers to use literate teaching and preaching approaches. Oral people will not grasp the literate teaching, but they will be reluctant to admit that there is a problem or tell what the problem is. Ministry leaders may conclude that people are spiritually unresponsive when the real culprit is the literate form of teaching that the teachers are using.<sup>16</sup>

Should ministry leaders not seek to discover the reasons behind what they think they are observing, they follow these assumptions and be lead to improper conclusions. The following comparison chart may help explain some of the differences between oral and literate learners.

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<sup>16</sup> Grant Lovejoy, "The Extent of Orality: 2012 Update 1," 2012, Accessed February 6, 2018, 17, <https://orality.imb.org/files/1/1255/Lovejoy--Extent%20of%20Orality%202012.pdf>.

Contrast of Oral and Literate Perspectives	
ORAL	LITERATE
<b>Event-Oriented</b> – Experience is what is real, integrated concept of knowledge, practical experience; you do what you can, you enjoy the moment.	<b>Task/Goal-Oriented</b> – Abstract, rational view of reality, you can make happen what you can imagine, knowledge is rational, objective ideas, represented in writing, accessible to all. You can make it happen.
<b>Relational</b> – Values based on what is required or expected by the group.	<b>Pragmatic</b> – Values based on what works, or what was agreed in writing focus is the specific written agreement.
<b>Functional Knowledge</b> – What is needed to maintain relationships, community, accepted values.	<b>Factual Knowledge</b> – What is need to understand details, analyze, organize, control, manage and change structure or system.
<b>Word is Bond</b> – My identity is tied up with my actions and statement.	<b>What is Written Can be Negotiated</b> – <i>what is written</i> has precedence over what was <i>said or meant</i> ; Words on a paper are the third party in any relationship.
<b>Truth</b> – Dynamic, relates to relationships; concrete knowledge valued over logical deduction.	<b>Truth</b> – Objective, relates to rational analysis of facts, descriptions, repeatable events and patterns (all of which are <i>recorded</i> for reference); linear logic valued.
<b>Life Skills</b> – Practical functions, professional or artistic expression.	<b>Knowledge</b> – Information oriented.
<b>Memory</b> – History, legends, stories handed down by memory, publicly told, extensive memory capacity; Knowledge may be a sacred commodity, for only certain people.	<b>Information</b> – Recorded and collected, externalized, for general knowledge; valued skills are referencing, analyzing and manipulating, reconfiguring known facts.
<b>Tradition, Heritage</b>	<b>Change, Innovation, Self-Expression</b>
<b>Morality</b> – Personal integrity, relational obligations determined by what people and community expect of you.	<b>Morality</b> – Fulfilling formal, stated promises; promises and commitments are dependent on what is known at the time; more information can <i>change the obligation</i> .

Copyright © 2005 Orville Boyd Jenkins

Orville Boyd Jenkins March 2005

Table 1:  
Contrast of Oral and Literate Perspectives<sup>17</sup>

Ministry leaders who become aware of, then adapt their teaching methodologies to these factors will greatly increase their effectiveness when communicating with oral learners. Dr. Lovejoy, who has researched the field of orality a great deal, offers this valuable insight, “Ministries who adjust their approach to the literacy level of their group, whatever that level may be, can expect improved communication, more learning, and more life change among the hearers. Extensive research among Christian outreach in Muslim communities found that incorporating an oral communication strategy into their

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<sup>17</sup> Dr. Orville Jenkins, “Stories and Storytelling: Reclaiming our Oral Heritage,” June 26, 2006, Accessed February 1, 2018, <http://orvillejenkins.com/orality/storyoralityojtr.html>.

work with oral cultures was associated with seeing 4.4 times more churches established.”<sup>18</sup>

### **How May An Oral Learning Pastor Be Prepared Educationally?**

Ironically, the greatest concentrations of oral learners live in the same areas experiencing the greatest numerical growth for The Church. The Global Survey on Theological Education, published in 2013, listed this as the first of their top findings, “There are not enough theological schools in the regions of the world where Christianity is growing rapidly (Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia).”<sup>19</sup> This creates a challenge as well as an opportunity. Part of the challenge is found in adequate educational opportunities for those who would lead the many churches which develop each year. Regionally placed educational institutions are not able to produce enough pastors to match the numeric growth. When asked the following question, “What are the most important elements in a program of preparation and/or formation for Christian ministry?” Experiential education was named consistently in the narrative responses as the basic requirement in preparation for ministry.”<sup>20</sup> The Global Survey went on to reveal, “Other elements named frequently as ‘most important’ in preparation for ministry include Biblical understanding, spirituality, discipleship and mentoring, and partnerships with congregations.”<sup>21</sup> While the top priority in these areas of rapid church growth are for

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<sup>18</sup> Grant Lovejoy, “The Extent of Orality: 2012 Update 1,” 2012, Accessed February 6, 2018, 17, <https://orality.imb.org/files/1/1255/Lovejoy--Extent%20of%20Orality%202012.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> “Global Survey on Theological Education,” GlobeTheoLib online library - Globethics, June 2013, accessed February 3, 2018, <http://www.globethics.net/web/gtl/research/global-survey>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

practical, experiential learning, meetings those needs is not as easy to see as there are inherent differences between literate based education and oral learning styles. “In light of oralities approach of practical thinking against abstract patterns, consideration should be given made to include practical content even to the theoretical divisions of theological and biblical divisions, linking its content to practical aspects in the learner’s context.”<sup>22</sup>

A growing response from literates who listen to oral learners and pay attention to content, contextualization and differing worldviews is to adapt their teaching into oral friendly models. This is emphasized by Willis and Snowden, “...the obvious conclusion that the majority of the world population prefers to learn by oral means over print or any other literate forms of learning.”<sup>23</sup> What has been long known and practiced in orality in many countries, including the African continent, has been challenged by the growth and expansion of Western style education.

Over the centuries, the predominant mode of teaching and learning for the majority of African people has been through Orality. Thus, Africa has poetry, storytelling, art (music and dance), and apprenticeship or mentoring as key avenues for educating the next generations of adults. But the dawn of Western oriented education over the last two centuries has gradually replaced most of the oral, informal African educational approach.

This is true for both secular and theological programs.<sup>24</sup>

This was echoed by the leader of one denomination who stated after seeing the impact of orality upon a group of his leaders, “We are Africans. We are oral people. This is who we

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<sup>22</sup> Charles Madinger, ed., “Oralities & Literacies – Communicating Christ Among Oral Cultures,” International Orality Network, 2012, accessed February 3, 2018, 44, <https://orality.net/content/oralities-literacies-chapter-9-communicating-christ-among-oral-cultures/>.

<sup>23</sup> Avery T. Willis and Mark Snowden, *Truth that Sticks: How to Communicate Velcro Truth in a Teflon World* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010), 27-28.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Madinger, ed., “Oralities & Literacies – Communicating Christ Among Oral Cultures,” International Orality Network, 2012, accessed February 3, 2018, 43, <https://orality.net/content/oralities-literacies-chapter-9-communicating-christ-among-oral-cultures/>.

are. We lost it as we felt forced to pursue western models of education in order to keep up. However, we need to return to our roots.”<sup>25</sup> He recognized the effect a reemergence of orality had upon his leaders and since then has taken strides to reintroduce oral methods of teaching and instruction into their educational models. After having gone through orality training, one elderly man expressed his gratitude when he said, “Thank you for giving us back our dignity.”<sup>26</sup>

We have shared how literate communicators may better understand oral communicators. Each functions in different modes of communication, social interaction and thinking. As these factors are continually examined, understood and applied, improvements to communication will continue to develop. We need to examine one more phenomenon which has developed first among more literate communicators, then seek to understand its potential impact.

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with the author, Johannesburg, South Africa, September 2015.

<sup>26</sup> As told from denominational leader in conversation after an event in Nairobi, Kenya, March 2014.

SECTION 2:  
THOSE WHO ARE ORAL LEARNERS BY PREFERENCE

“Tell me a story long and true  
We aren't what we say we are what we do”<sup>27</sup>

**Generational Shifts in the Western World**

*Decline in Literacy*

In the West, the more recent generations have experienced rapid changes. We have at least a generation or two who have been raised in constant contact with media through television, gaming, and 24/7 connectivity to the web. The youngest generation in the West has never known a time without these technological marvels. What impact does this have upon literacy in the West? The statistics suggest that there is a significant negative impact and that it is growing. “The rate of decline in literary reading is accelerating.”<sup>28</sup> “(From 1982 to 2002), young adults (18-34) have declined from being those most likely to read literature to those least likely.”<sup>29</sup>

Is it possible to determine the reasons for this dramatic drop in literacy in a country which ranks high in education? While the survey suggested that it may not be possible to directly pin the decline in literacy to the increase in electronic media, the timing of the two occurrences cannot be overlooked. “The decline in reading correlates

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<sup>27</sup> Phillip Phillips and David Harris, *Tell Me a Story*, The World from The Side of the Moon, Sony Phillip /ATV Music Publishing LLC, Universal Music Publishing Group.

<sup>28</sup> Dana Gioia, Chairman, “Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America,” June 2004, accessed February 2, 2018, 5, <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/ReadingAtRisk.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 6.

with increased participation in a variety of electronic media, including the Internet, video games, and portable digital devices.”<sup>30</sup>

Another confirming view of the decreasing trend for reading in the U.S. can be found in a 2012 report from the U.S Department of Education. The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies uses the International Adult Literacy Survey and the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey to examine key statistics in the U.S. and twenty-two other countries.<sup>31</sup> All of the participating countries are highly developed, educationally advanced and economically stable nations. These surveys look at literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments. In each of the areas measured, the U.S. ranked lower than the majority of other countries, with the lowest comparative ranking being in numeracy.

However, all is not lost. While the U.S. is dropping in literature caused, in part, at least, by the increase in personal technology devices, those devices are creating a new skillset for many Americans. It’s not just Americans either, as countries around the world have embraced the trends towards personal devices and global connectivity. This trend offers hope towards new opportunities.

Indian television producer, Prithvi Nandi, published an article titled “Will Technology Usher in an Era of Illiteracy?” He hints at a direction for our future, “New technology will no longer divide the world into literate and illiterate people but will bring everyone together in a common platform where the ability to read and write will no longer matter. You will have a new world where people will need an entirely different

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>31</sup> “Literacy, Numeracy, and Problem Solving in Technology...” National Center for Education Statistics, October 2013, accessed February 2, 2018, 1, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014008.pdf>.

kind of skills set to succeed.”<sup>32</sup> How will this develop into a common platform where literates and oral learners can communicate more freely, perhaps even equally? We will explore more of this idea and its possibilities throughout this paper. Specifically, we will examine the role of visual aids as teaching tools, aids in crafting communication and as memory markers which are able to be created and understood by users on both sides of the equation. It is quite likely that further answers will come from those whose entire lives have been immersed in the technological advantages we are seeing today. They will become the creators of mechanisms and solutions which we have not yet thought to consider. In the meantime, we can continue to lay a foundation for the vision of teaching oral learners without requiring literacy.

#### *Increase in Global Compassion and Action*

Along a different track towards helping to make improvements in our world, the UN Sustainable Development Summit adopted seventeen holistic goals aimed at improving our world across nearly all aspects of human life, including care of the planet on which we live. While they cover all people in developing areas, these goals definitely overlap many societies which are filled with oral learners. The goals are shown in the infographic below.

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<sup>32</sup> David Claydon, ed., *A New Vision, a New Heart, a Renewed Call*, Lausanne Occasional Papers vol. 3 (Pattaya, Thailand: N.p., 2004), accessed February 4, 2018, 34.





Figure 3<sup>33</sup>

Many organizations are involved in working towards meeting these goals. One which has invested considerable thought into how these sustainable development goals may be addressed is Globethics.net. Their stated purpose is:

Globethics.net is a global network on ethics with 144,000 registered participants (August 2015) from over 200 countries and territories... with a wealth of resources and news of programmes on responsible leadership and other topics carried out with a broad base of partners around the world, including nine regional programme partners and over 40 national contacts. Our aim is to contribute to a more just, sustainable and peaceful world through ethical orientation. This means promoting values-driven decisions and actions, especially those of current and future leaders as decision-makers.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Stéphanie Thomson, ed., “What are the Sustainable Development Goals?” World Economic Forum, September 16, 2015, accessed February 3, 2018. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/09/what-are-the-sustainable-development-goals/>.

<sup>34</sup> “Ethics and the Sustainable Development Goals SDGs 2015-2030,” August 21, 2015, accessed February 3, 2018, 1, [http://www.globethics.net/documents/4289936/18297332/GE\\_Ethics\\_SDGs\\_150825.pdf/55dbaa9c-9906-43be-83f4-313cd7e449ae](http://www.globethics.net/documents/4289936/18297332/GE_Ethics_SDGs_150825.pdf/55dbaa9c-9906-43be-83f4-313cd7e449ae).

They created a very thorough report based on studying and evaluating all seventeen of the goals, indicating on a four part scale in which they noted their own potential involvement in contributing towards progress on each of the goals. The aims of this endeavor are far beyond the scope of this paper. However, one touch point is found in education. The stated education goal is “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” and one subset goal is stated as: “...by 2030 ensure that all youth and at least x% of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.”<sup>35</sup> In their appeal for help, Globethic.net acknowledges an interesting situation in that they feel there is an overabundance of information in this particular area coming from the West; “—too much information is coming from westerns sources, little attention is given to scholars in the south.”<sup>36</sup>

They make an appeal for those in the Global South to make contributions; however, it is limited to PhD candidates.<sup>37</sup> This aspect of their appeal reveals a potential oversight both in not offering education in ways appropriate for oral learners nor offering input from those in the Global South who are adept at communicating through all manner of oral means and may have valuable field-based input for some of the Sustainable Development Goals. Could this create an opportunity for those in the West who are familiar with such oral communications, to become a bridge, linking the highly literate researchers with the highly oral field personnel? This is one of the purposes we will

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 7.

continue to explore, the potential for linking literate and oral communicators in meaningful ways.

We are examining two factors here which collide nicely. The shift away from literature into digital devices and the growing awareness of our roles as global citizens. There are perhaps an untold number of organizations dedicated to helping others both locally and globally. We cannot examine the entire scope of humanitarian work, but for our purposes, we can highlight one as an example of how citizens of their home countries are willing to help those in need, wherever they may be found. The title of Renée Fox' book may tell the story on its own, *Doctors Without Borders: Humanitarian Quests, Impossible Dreams of Médecins Sans Frontières*. Fox looked at needs and limitations and decided to do something about both. The effort she began has grown to become quite a legacy and testament to humanitarianism.

When needed and called into action, most of the volunteers serving with Doctors Without Borders come from within their own country, but there are also critical staff who come from other international locations because of a common desire to "...realize 'a new world order' of medical care that embodied humanitarian intervention and the duty to interfere, bearing witness to human rights violations even as they treated their victims."<sup>38</sup> This 'duty to interfere' leads these volunteers to "run scores of unique missions in high-risk situations, with 'persistent national borders.'"<sup>39</sup> They are not alone as many people believe in their mission and share in other ways. "Over half a million people contribute \$10 or \$20 to MSF each month, while others contribute larger sums each year, because

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<sup>38</sup> Donald W. Light, *Doctors Without Borders* (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2015), 384.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 385.

MSF has come stand for a deeper humanism that stirs people's souls, a vision of a better life and a better world."<sup>40</sup> Similar humanitarian efforts exist in practically every area of need. Certainly the opportunity exists to combine efforts to reach oral learners in a variety of ways.

### *Increase in Digital Dominance and Social Media*

To further understand this shift from local to global concern, let's consider two queries asked by Leif Wenar of the University of Sheffield. The first is, "What morality requires of us in a world of poverty and inequality depends both on what our duties are in the abstract, and on what we can do to help."<sup>41</sup> The second consideration is, "What we as individuals need to know is how to fulfil our duties to the distant poor. We need to know what we must actually do."<sup>42</sup> Khanna suggests why these considerations have taken on new dimensions. "Connectivity has replaced division as the new paradigm of global organization. Human society is undergoing a fundamental transformation by which functional infrastructure tells us more about how the world works than political borders."<sup>43</sup> Wenar's questions continue to capture the attention of more people in our digitally connected world. Evidence of the impact of the collision between these questions and the reduction of static borders is seen not only in organizations like Doctors

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Leif Wenar, "What We Owe to Distant Others," *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 283.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>43</sup> Parag Khanna, *Connectography: Mapping the Future of Global Civilization* (New York: Random House, 2017), 254-255, Kindle.

Without Borders but in others as well. Some of today's millennials are missionaries without ever leaving their favorite coffee hangout.

Larry Dossey suggests, "We yearn for unity with one another. The recent explosion of interest in genealogy, the study of one's family origins, can be seen as a hunger for oneness expressed through the attempt to restore historic connections."<sup>44</sup>

Dossey suggests other expressions of this hunger for oneness,

Consider the popularity of 'flash mobs,' which did not exist until recently, in which groups of people appear to emerge spontaneously to perform, sing, and dance in unison, evoking happiness and delight in the crowds around them. Flash mobs are a kind of celebration of unity and connectedness between people of all strata and cultures. The emergence of the crowd-funding phenomenon reflects the same instinct—the coming together of a great many people to finance a worthwhile project.<sup>45</sup>

Even amid the strife seen in our world, people are still drawn to people in beneficial ways such as these. Flash mobs and digitally driven crowd-funding are examples of high technology combining with high touch, the human element. How do each of these factors we've examined come together? Given the creativity of mankind, there are certainly a myriad of ways that have been, are being and will be expressed. For the sake of this paper, the illustration below may help to visually depict the merging of our three major areas of focus.

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<sup>44</sup> Larry Dossey, "Our Identity Crisis and a Solution: The One Mind," *EXPLORE: The Journal of Science and Healing* 12, no. 6 (November/December 2016): 395, accessed February 4, 2018, doi:10.1016/j.explore.2016.08.008.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

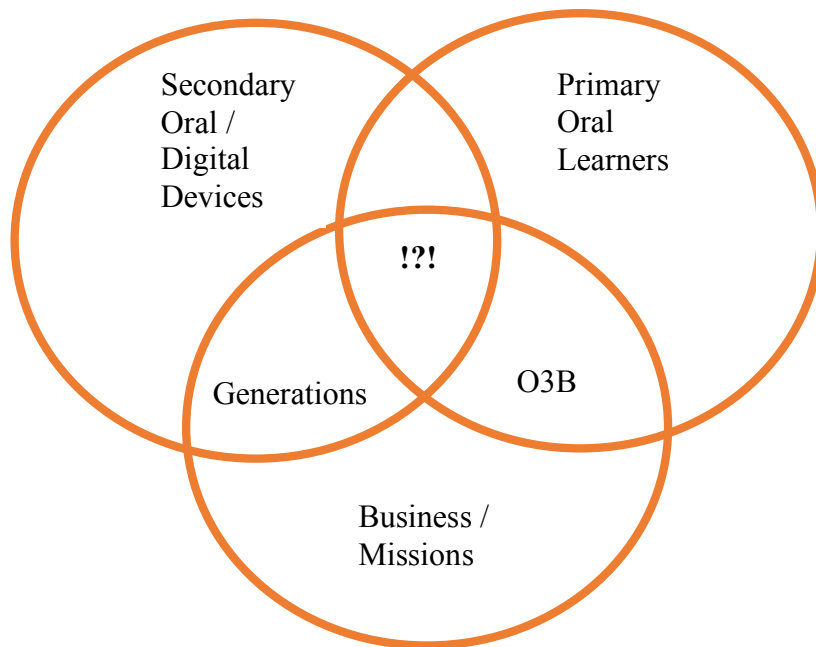


Figure 4:  
Intersections and Opportunities

One unique aspect about these social phenomena is that they can be initiated by anyone, anywhere. Today's digitally connected generations have used these factors to widen their gaze and bring many segments of our world closer together. Could these empathetic factors also be utilized in developing better communications between literate and oral learners? What might their efforts look like? What factors beyond those we have already discussed might impact their efforts to understand each other, then improve their methods of communication? Time will tell.

### **Awareness and Growth of Orality Based Solutions**

Innovations are often formed at ground zero, in the field, closest to where the need exists. Such was the case for the modern day orality movement as well. We do not have the space available here to track and report on the growth of this movement but we will take a look at observations made by those who have studied the process. Dr. Tom

Steffen has participated as a missionary in the Philippines, studied extensively and taught on missiology and orality as a professor of Intercultural Studies in the Cook School of Intercultural Studies at Biola University. One of the many contributions he has made into this field is a paper, “Chronological Communication of the Gospel Goes from Country to City.”<sup>46</sup>

The South East Asia Leadership conference held in Thailand in 1981 became the seminal moment when McIlwain’s chronological model would spread beyond the shores of the Philippine Islands to around the world within New Tribes Missions. Leaders returned to their respective fields of ministries and began to implement the chronological model designed for multiplying tribal churches that remain true to the Bible. Eventually, McIlwain would entitle his model Chronological Bible Teaching (CBT). While no one anticipated or expected it, a modern-day movement was just born. This did not go unnoticed by David Hesselgrave, who in *Scripture and Strategy* (1994) identified CBT as one of major contributions to missions in the twentieth century.<sup>47</sup>

Steffen tracks more than seventy organizations aimed at reaching oral learners. Looking further into just one of those, the International Orality Network (ION), gives us another perspective on how far this field is expanding. ION began in 2004 after the specific need for making disciples of oral learners was identified at the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism. ION describes themselves as “...an affiliation of agencies and organizations working together with the common goal of making God’s Word available to oral learners in culturally appropriate ways that enable church planting movements everywhere. ION has since grown to be a global network of over 2,000 organizations.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Tom Steffen, *Chronological Communication of the Gospel Goes from Country to City*, March 18, 2011, accessed January 27, 2018, <http://www.chiang-mai-orality.net/resources/Chronological.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> International Orality Network, accessed February 4, 2018, <https://orality.net/about/>.

From missionaries seeking a way to better communicate the truths of the Gospel to tribal people without knowledge of the Bible, to thousands of organizations comprising tens of thousands of people, the awareness of oral learning methods has indeed become a movement. It has moved beyond the simple telling of Bible stories to “include genealogies, song, art, symbols, drama, pictures, audiovisual, audio players, radio, film, television, webisodes.”<sup>49</sup> As seen in this list, orality is not limited to non-readers on far flung locations on our globe. Orality is a form of communication which finds expression in many ways. An increasing number of people are identifying themselves as oral communicators by preference. Once again, Steffen helps us to see that “... reaching oral learners finds the geographical lines between country and city quickly blurred. Primary orality soon morphs into secondary orality, and vice versa, across the world and across time.”<sup>50</sup>

There are, in fact, many models of orality now being employed. Chronological Bible Storying, (CBS) as it is now called, is just one of those ways. As we consider the amount of content the listeners would absorb in this model of teaching, the question comes to mind, wondering how those who cannot write could possibly retain all of this information.

Steffen offers an explanation, “The orality movement has moved beyond telling stories with strong exposition to include focused questions, dialogue/conversation, retelling the story, drawing pictures, composing songs, dramatizing. The power of the

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<sup>49</sup> Tom Steffen, *Chronological Communication of the Gospel Goes from Country to City*, March 10, 2011, Accessed January 27, 2018, 22, <http://www.chiang-mai-oralty.net/resources/Chronological.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 25.



visual to portray is now much more appreciated.”<sup>51</sup> Each of these elements serves a role in helping to cement the narrative teaching content into the memories of oral learners. Intentional dialogue focused on discovering truths and personal insights from the stories is a tremendously valuable tool in creating memorable moments from the stories. This process is essentially the same as many people have experienced when participating in written inductive Bible study, except this is all done orally. One truth which applies to both styles of inductive study is that personal discoveries are the insights most strongly remembered. Open dialogue produces many such discoveries.

Retelling of stories and dramatizing are additional means of repeating, revisiting and reimagining the stories. These simple techniques are valuable means for oral learners as they are methods of repetition. Immediate retelling of stories after having listened to the original is both a test and a confirmation that the story has been heard. When this is done together in pairs or small groups, the public telling and correcting not only locks the details of the story into individual memories but into the collective community as well. Dramatizing stories enhances this aspect even further while it may also add elements of fun in addition to the visual representation and exploration of the story.

Lastly, drawing pictures or reflecting on how available pictures may express the story and the creation of local songs are very strong mnemonics. Pictures may stay in the mind for years and well-crafted songs may become permanent. Studies even among Alzheimer’s patients have shown significant impact using music as therapy. “In music therapy, an increase in attention span was observed, and an improvement in expressive

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 23.

language and in short and long-term memory, as evidenced by the ability to learn and recall the names of the others members of the group as well as past life experiences.”<sup>52</sup>

Throughout this paper we will explore different aspects of oral communications to understand how these various factors may contribute to new models of teaching as well as greater appreciation of the uniqueness’s of the learning styles of those different from us. The wisdom from both sides of the spectrum, literates and oral learners, suggests that for obtaining, retaining and reproducing such content, visual imagery is a key.

### Understanding Oral Learners

“...Jesus taught his disciples to pray in the Aramaic of daily communication rather than in the classical Hebrew of written texts.”<sup>53</sup>

Willis Ott discusses oral learners in Chapter Ten of *Oralities and Literacies*. He points out an opportunity, “God has given our privileged generation many gifts that no other generation has known the combination that we have including, but not limited to: a) a widening expertise for exegeting the Scriptures, b) a widening permission for translators that they may communicate the Scriptures meaningfully, c) a widening access and use of hand-held audio devices all over the world, d) an availability of economically feasible equipment for recording and editing audio files, e) a widening knowledge of how

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<sup>52</sup> Melissa Brotons and Patricia Marti, “Music Therapy with Alzheimer’s Patients and Their Family Caregivers: A Pilot Project,” *Journal of Music Therapy* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 145.

<sup>53</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 86.

humans communicate and how individuals convince others of new ideas.”<sup>54</sup> In short, Ott has outlined that we have a unique opportunity based on increased ability to handle the Scriptures in a variety of ways, increased technology to deliver scriptural messages and increased awareness of how people think and learn.

In demonstrating connections between some of these opportunities, Ott makes the statement, “It is important that communicators recognize that everyone in the world learns by means of what they hear. Not only that, but also most prefer to learn by listening. Most people are also visual learners.”<sup>55</sup> We have discussed the fact that the majority of people worldwide are primary oral learners and that the next largest group after that are oral learners by preference, or secondary oral learners. The majority of these people are also visual learners, which is readily observable in the number of users of visually driven digital technology devices. Ott offers the following illustration to visually depict these categories.

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<sup>54</sup> Charles Madinger, ed., “Oralities & Literacies – Communicating Christ Among Oral Cultures,” International Orality Network, 2012, accessed February 6, 2018, 60, <https://orality.net/content/oralities-literacies-chapter-9-communicating-christ-among-oral-cultures/>.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 61.

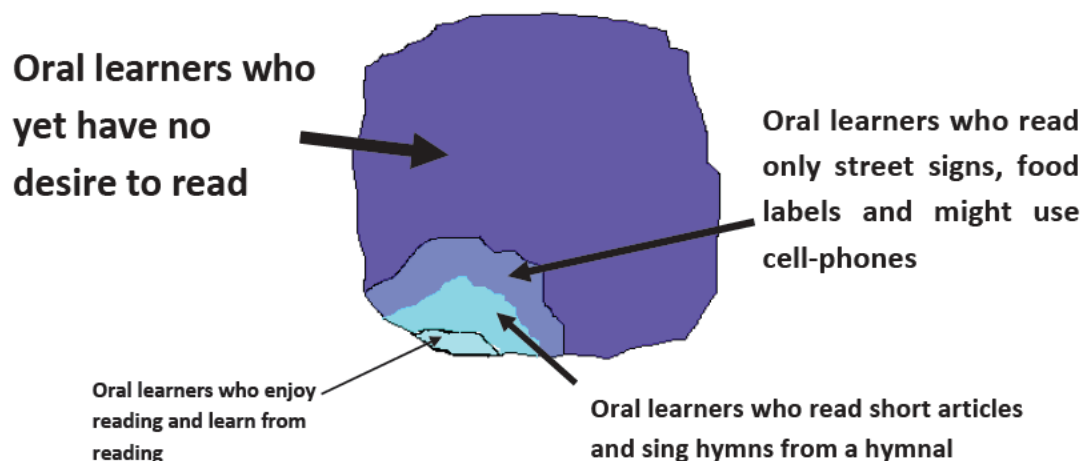


Figure 5:  
All People are Oral Learners<sup>56</sup>

In the overlap of primary and secondary oral learners, there is an opportunity to increase communication between them through intentionally embracing their oral and visual preferences. What is needed in order to create methods and tools which will help primary oral learners is to pay attention to some of the guidelines discovered as best practices by those actively studying this field.

Kenneth Bailey's offers some insights based upon different levels of oral exactness. We will look at his suggestions and then seek to apply these to the use of visual teaching tools. Formal for retelling of Scripture stories, informal controlled oral tradition for retelling accounts of theology as guided by the pictures. Bailey is an expert in Middle Eastern culture, so his examples are from within those cultures.

Bailey identifies three forms of oral tradition. The first, informal uncontrolled oral tradition, has no identifiable teacher, no identifiable student, and no structure in which material is transmitted. It is represented by Middle Eastern rumor transmission. The second, formal controlled oral tradition, has a clearly identified teacher, a clearly identified student, and a clearly identified block of material which is memorized and passed on. It is represented by the memorization of the

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<sup>56</sup> Charles, Madinger, ed., "Oralities & Literacies – Communicating Christ Among Oral Cultures," International Orality Network, 2012, accessed February 3, 2018, 61, <https://orality.net/content/oralities-literacies-chapter-9-communicating-christ-among-oral-cultures/>.

Qur'an by Muslim sheiks or the memorization of extensive liturgies in Eastern Orthodoxy.<sup>57</sup>

In the examples of humanitarian work which we have discussed so far, Bailey's first form of oral tradition could be used sufficiently. While the information to be shared is important, the order of how that information is shared is not always as vital. An example could be found in explaining to non-literate villagers about the reasons to boil water to control spread of disease. While there are steps that should be done in order, a fair amount of the information may be shared casually, in natural conversation, rather than listed out in a literate, linear manner. When approaching Scripture from the sense of theological learning, some would advocate for Bailey's second form, the formal controlled oral tradition. Those who do so suggest that the very nature of the Scriptures demand that they be shared in exactitude matching their choice of Bible translation. However, as Ott has stated, we live in an era of 'widening permission for translators' to create forms of the Scriptures which are appropriately crafted for the listening audience. Bailey has one more for us to examine:

Between these two forms of transmission is what Bailey calls informal controlled oral tradition. It is informal in its setting—often the gathering of villagers in the evening for the telling of stories and the recitation of poetry—and there is no set teacher or specifically identified student. The transmission of the material, however, is controlled by the community using three levels of flexibility. There is no flexibility in the recitation of poems or proverbs, and there is total flexibility in the telling of jokes and casual news. Between these two poles is a level of flexibility which allows for some individual interpretation of the tradition. Into this latter category fall parables, stories, and historical narratives important to the life of the community. The teller is permitted a degree of flexibility to reflect his/her own style and interests, but the main lines of the story cannot be changed. Bailey concludes by noting that the Synoptic Gospels include primarily the same literary forms preserved by this sort of oral tradition.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> K. E. Bailey, "Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," *Asia Journal of Theology* 5 (1991): 36-37.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-45, 50.

This third form, the informal controlled oral tradition is where most missions organizations fall in terms of translating, crafting and developing biblical messages for oral learners. There is a bit of divergence between these agencies on how much flexibility can be used between the total non-flexible and the degree of permission. However, in the field, many of these decisions are worked out based upon a combination of worldview perspectives and an available language database. Two examples may suffice in offering an explanation. In world areas which have never seen snow, to translate biblical references to 'snow' exactly would not be possible, so alternatives from within the cultural conditions which would accurately explain the concept intended in the passage. The other factor for many languages is that the available word count in their language draws from a relatively small pool. In these cases, the translators and message crafters' task become a bit more complicated. In order to convey the message as intended, yet with fewer words, they must rely on longer descriptions rather than more direct translations.

### SECTION 3:

#### REENGAGING ANCIENT-NEW METHODOLOGIES

“Stories have many uses, often intertwining, from the use of educating values and serving as history books, to the preservation of culture and the soul.”<sup>59</sup>

#### **Extrapolating Orality Based Solutions**

##### *Understanding What Worked and Why*

If it is agreeable that visual images can be beneficial for communicating and even training oral learners, the next question will be, “What types of visuals are acceptable?” To answer this, we will look first at a couple of common assumptions about oral learners. In examining these assumptions, we will learn something about the attitudes many literates hold towards non-literates. We will also learn about the capabilities of non-literate oral learners.

##### Assumption 1: They Only Understand Simple Line Drawings<sup>60</sup>

A common misconception is that because oral learners do not read that they must also be of a lower intelligence quotient than their literate counterparts.<sup>61</sup> This is simply not true. Oral learners possess a different mental skill set. This does not make them intellectually inferior. This is highlighted in the educational maxim: “Everybody is a

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<sup>59</sup> Shannon Smith, “Native Storytellers Connect the Past and the Future ...” accessed February 8, 2018, <http://cojmc.unl.edu/nativedaughters/storytellers/native-storytellers-connect-the-past-and-the-future>.

<sup>60</sup> Diane Pamela Smith, “Visual Art and Orality,” *Dharma Deepika* (January 2007): 11.

<sup>61</sup> Gerd Baumann, *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition: Wolfson College Lectures 1985*, (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1986), 3.

genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”<sup>62</sup> What is beneficial about this quip is to consider the comparison being made between two supposedly equal participants. Yet, we cannot fail to see the inadequacies of such a challenge.

As simplistic as this seems, this is comparable to how some literates view their oral learning colleagues. It follows that when highly educated literates consider the use of visuals in teaching oral learners, they may assume that the images can only be the simplest line drawings.<sup>63</sup>

History has not always followed this assumption. During the Middle Ages, a period of widespread low literacy, the Church would post pictures on the walls to “stir devotion, reminding the faithful of the suffering of the Son of God, the cleansing power of his blood, and the time they will spend being purged of sin.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Supposedly, Einstein said this, but no one, including the brilliant minds at Princeton, could validate this statement. That the literates cannot verify this is of little concern.

<sup>63</sup> Diane Pamela Smith, “Visual Art and Orality,” *Dharma Deepika* (January 2007): 11.

<sup>64</sup> Peter Marshall, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Reformation* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 5.





Figure 6:  
A Book of Hours, prepared for French noblewoman Yolanda de LaLaing<sup>65</sup>

This image is a challenge to those who hold to the ‘simple line drawings’ limitation. The purpose of this image, as well as the woodcut which is shown below, was to motivate the people to pray the Prayer of the Sacred Heart of Christ. Doing so was worth a reduction of 80,000 years in Purgatory. This would have been highly motivational to everyone, especially oral learners, to study, understand and apply the message of this image to their own eternal destiny. The complexities of this image, which

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 5.

cannot easily be understood without considerable explanation, do not align with this theory, although the required prayer was fairly short.<sup>66</sup>



Figure 7<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Prayer of the Sacred Heart of Christ: “O most holy heart of Jesus, fountain of every blessing, I adore you, I love you, and with lively sorrow for my sins I offer you this poor heart of mine. Make me humble, patient, pure and wholly obedient to your will. Grant, Good Jesus, that I may live in you and for you. Protect me in the midst of danger. Comfort me in my afflictions. Give me health of body, assistance in my temporal needs, your blessing on all that I do, and the grace of a holy death. Amen.” accessed December 31, 2017, <http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=231>.

<sup>67</sup> Ecce Homo, Sacred Art, Pinterest, accessed December 31, 2017, <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/518265869605621371/>.

It is easy enough to challenge this assumption that oral learners cannot understand complex images by simple tests. One way to test this is to observe images which they create. Are they simple? Complex? Multilayered? Do their visuals carry messages? Can we understand them? Another test is to share various images with them, then ask what thoughts they have when viewing these images. These conversations may reveal that there is room for a wider understanding of the visual literacy of oral learners.

#### Assumption 2: They Cannot Understand Dimensional Perspectives<sup>68</sup>

This theory says that non-literates are not capable of understanding complex drawings, incomplete images or perspective in drawings.<sup>69</sup> While this may seem reasonable, it also has limitations. One way to explain this is by a comparison in the world of literates. Not all who read, do so at the same level. Some are adept at divining the deeper meanings of Shakespearean poetry, while others' capacities are reached viewing graphic novels.

The same is true for oral learners. Some are capable of simple Aboriginal drawings, which primarily use line drawings and shapes. Others can 'read' "...painted narratives (which have) become important sources of knowledge about local mythology, deities, heroes, epics, folktales and customs."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Diane Pamela Smith, "Visual Art and Orality," *Dharma Deepika* (January 2007): 11.

<sup>69</sup> J. O. Terry, James Byron Slack, and Steve Evans, *Chronological Bible Storying: An Introduction to the Oral Communication of the Bible* (Johannesburg: International Publications Services, 1996), 76.

<sup>70</sup> Charu Smita Gupta, *Indian Folk and Tribal Paintings* (New Delhi, India: Lustre/Roli Books, 2008), ii.

It is clearly not a simple issue to understand, as evidenced in the comments about the painting of Christ on Lake Geneva by Konrad Witz.<sup>71</sup>



Figure 8:  
Christ on Lake Geneva by Konrad Witz

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<sup>71</sup> Peter Marshall, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Reformation* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 9, colorized version accessed December 31, 2017 at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Konrad\\_Witz\\_008.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Konrad_Witz_008.jpg).

The description seems contradictory as this painting from 1444 is praised for being one of the first to accurately show dimensions of landscape yet seems to forget about perspective in interpreting the images of people in the scene. “With his portrayal of an oversize Christ on the water with the diminutive disciples in the boat Witz offers a commentary on the contemporary Church.”<sup>72</sup> Why is this seen as an ‘oversized Christ’? Why is it not seen as simple perspective? Christ is in the foreground, closer to the viewer, thus ‘larger’ than the disciples who are farther away in the boat, rather than being ‘diminutive.’ Questions such as these indicate that everyone will not ‘see’ or interpret a given image in the same way.

We need to admit that there are limitations in communication. Simply distributing a picture of the Pope does not cause more people to become Catholic. However, if while distributing pictures of the Pope a story is told about how this very important man takes time while traveling to notice people whom most choose not to notice, then it becomes more than a picture, it is a visual story. If the story explains how he smiles at them, lays his hands on them, and prays for them; then it is no longer just a picture of the Pope but has become a teaching tool. Now, there may be more people interested in becoming Catholic. If so, it will be because of the story connected to the picture.

O’Neil contends, “The concept of literacy has expanded to include knowledge and skill in multimodal areas; images, gesture, music, as well as written and spoken words are valued for their expressive attributes.”<sup>73</sup> The importance of gestures cannot be over

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<sup>72</sup> Peter Marshall, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Reformation* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 9.

<sup>73</sup> Kathleen Ellen O’Neil, “Reading Pictures: Developing Visual Literacy for Greater Comprehension,” *The Reading Teacher* 65, no. 3 (2011): 222.



stated. The variable nature of how people point for example, if not understood from one culture to another can create considerable tension and even send wrong or poorly received messages. “Many African cultures associate the left hand with negative values and actions, and therefore there is a taboo against using it for giving, receiving, or eating.”<sup>74</sup> For those practiced in dramatic arts, there can be added challenges of expressing their normal art form in another culture. Finger pointing, lip pointing, and head gestures are also very important to understand. “Lip pointing, head pointing, eye pointing and gaze are governed by social cultural constraints relating to age, status and context. Beyond these, there are certain gestures which when combined with words, take on whole new meanings.”<sup>75</sup> O’Neil continues, “Both teachers and students can broaden their capacity for perception and comprehension from a careful study of the elements that compose expression in sign systems other than the printed word.” Does it make a difference what position the body is when delivering a line from a drama? Culture dictates the answer to this question and is likely to be different when moving across borders or between people groups. “The storyteller’s position such as sitting may be a metaphor for social relations. Body posture and movement have strong moral connotations.”<sup>76</sup> Haley’s thesis in studying dramatic arts is that there needs to be parallelism between what is written or spoken and what is shown or acted.<sup>77</sup> Polanyi

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<sup>74</sup> Heather Brookes and Victoria Nyst, “Gestures in the Sub-Saharan Region.” *Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft / Handbooks of Linguistics and Communication Science (HSK)* 38, no. 2. doi:10.1515/9783110302028.1154.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 1155.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 1157.

<sup>77</sup> Brian Paltridge et al., “Extending the Notion of ‘Text’: The Visual and Performing Arts Doctoral Thesis,” *Visual Communication* 12 (2013): 402.

adds, “Music, poetry, painting: the arts—whether abstract or representative— are a dwelling in and a breaking out which lie somewhere between science and worship.”<sup>78</sup>

While for some, performing arts and dramatic presentations of Bible stories may be exploratory, they must also be viewed and understood through cultural lenses. What is seen speaks as loud or louder than what is said. Visual literacy is by necessity, a culturally driven skill.

As a skill, visual literacy requires learning. This learning needs to be contextualized to be accurate. Recall the biblical story of Nathan’s confrontation of King David after the King’s multiple sins and attempted cover-ups. The story ends in the seminal moment, when Nathan speaks those piercing words to David, “You are that man.” What did that ‘sound’ like? Was there anger, condemnation, compassion, conviction, guilt, embarrassment or some other emotion in Nathan’s voice? Worldview perspectives will cause any potential answers to vary based upon cultural biases, which cannot and should not be ignored. Consider a picture of two men holding hands while walking down the street. In America and some other nations, this could be construed that these men have an intimate relationship as lovers. In many Asian and African countries, this is understood as the actions of two friends. It is understood that they are not lovers, merely friends who are walking together. Context shapes meaning.

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<sup>78</sup> Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post Critical Philosophy* (London, UK: Routledge, 2005), 212.

### Assumption 3: Pictures are an Unnecessary Distraction

This assumption is illustrated in the following experiences. Paul and Teresa Koehler trained storytellers in India. While they believe in the use of pictures for certain portions of story-telling training, they caution against reliance on pictures. The introduction of large, brightly colored picture books that went along with the story sets were eagerly received initially. However, the summer of 1999 brought monsoon floods that destroyed many of the picture books while still more were destroyed by termites.

With the picture books no longer available, they went back to training without visual aids. They noticed that the storytellers now had to rely on their memories rather than being able to look at the picture books. “They began to understand and memorize the stories more adequately and as a result they became more effective storytellers.”<sup>79</sup>

### Clarifying the Purpose of Visual Images

However, this need not be the definitive word on the use of visual aids. In dealing with memory and visual aids, that there are two ways in which pictures can be incredible visual aids in storytelling.

The first is as a tool in learning the story for the storyteller. The use of a locally created, contextually correct images can be a very effective in locking the story into the mind of the storyteller. Images that are unique stand out as easier to remember. Images that are intentional speak to our minds and our imagination as well. “...memory is

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<sup>79</sup> Paul F. Koehler, *Telling God's Stories with Power: Biblical Storytelling in Oral Cultures* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library Publishers, 2010), 110.



enhanced when visual imagery is utilized.”<sup>80</sup> The combination of these two elements create strong neural links when learning a story. “Within the temporal lobe the viewer recognizes familiar objects...this process leads the viewer to access long-term memory, synthesize input imagery, and access information stored in long-term memory.”<sup>81</sup>

These image-driven mnemonics become memory magnets, locking the storyline into place. The storyteller does not have to show anyone else the picture that is in their mind. They simply use that picture as a mental table of contents to recall each portion of the story. The picture serves as a mental roadmap of the story. The storyteller who has committed a unique picture to mind simply recalls the picture, connecting key thoughts which trigger memories for what each piece of the picture represents. The story is embedded into the image.

A second benefit is that the storyteller now seems quite relaxed when telling the story, allowing them to engage more with the audience. ‘Told’ stories or performed stories are so much better than awkwardly memorized works. Stories told well bring acknowledgment, engagement, then conviction and transformation.

The Koehler’s have continued to use pictures for the storytellers, mostly in training. Images are used in learning the order of stories in the Bible. They created a series of simple line drawings, one for each story, to create a ‘clothesline chronology.’<sup>82</sup> The storytellers are given a mixed pile of the story cards and challenged to properly place

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<sup>80</sup> James Tyler Rosier, Lawrence Locker, Jr., and Karen Z. Naufel, “Art and Memory: An Examination of the Learning Benefits of Visual-Art Exposure,” *Georgia Southern University* (2010): 14.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>82</sup> Paul F. Koehler, *Telling God's Stories with Power: Biblical Storytelling in Oral Cultures* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library Publishers, 2010), 108.

them on the clothesline in chronological order. This exercise helps the storytellers not only remember the stories according to their individual images but accurately order the flow of the people and events. In this case, the chronologically ordered clothesline serves as a Visual Table of Contents (VToC).<sup>83</sup>

Jay Moon, who served as a missionary in Africa, takes the idea of using images even further. He suggests that proverbs may also represent signs and symbols. While proverbs do not fit the type of visual aid that most people think about, Moon points out that the shared language that they create between people of the same culture also create internal images in the minds of those communicating. The fact that those internal images may not be exactly the same does not diminish their impact. The slight variations from one person to another is a form of personalization that actually makes the effect of the internal image and the connecting proverb a stronger mnemonic.

Moon draws from Mbiti to emphasize the pervasive power and influence of religious symbols in Africa, “Religion permeates into all departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible to isolate it.”<sup>84</sup> That religion can be so pervasive is easier to understand when considering that it is common practice for fetishes to be carried or worn on the body or clothing. Homes and public places often display symbols of local traditional beliefs. Moon adds, “Proverbs function as religious symbols that deal with the

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<sup>83</sup> Visual Table of Contents (VToC) is a phrase coined by the author to help us think about new ways in which oral learners may organize their thoughts and build mnemonic devices.

<sup>84</sup> W. Jay Moon, *African Proverbs Reveal Christianity in Culture: A Narrative Portrayal of Builsa Proverbs Contextualizing Christianity in Ghana* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 45.

complexities of African life, thereby serving as a window for one to look through and see the soul of the culture.”<sup>85</sup>

Moon’s work with African proverbs offers incredible insights into discovering what is important to a people group and how they think. Once that understanding is found the presentation of the stories of God can be contextualized in ways that are easily accepted and personally meaningful. These are often expressed in verbal/visual images or metaphors. Proverbs and pictures that are locally sourced share a common effect in connecting internal images with external realities. “Proverbs, serving as religious symbols, powerfully link both feelings and ideas.”<sup>86</sup>

This was demonstrated in Smith’s account of a group of American women who went to co-teach a women’s seminar along with a group of African women. Some of the books they were going to teach from had artwork on the covers that directly identified with the local women. As they began to discuss which topics they might teach, the African women scooped up the four books with African art, declaring, “We will teach these.” As that decision had been made without even knowing the content, the American women asked why those books had been chosen. The simple answer came back, “These are ours.”<sup>87</sup> The African art on the covers spoke to their eyes even before the written words could reach their minds.

Can we trust that the memories of seemingly simple people are reliable when they don’t have written records? Perhaps we can borrow a lesson from science. “The culture

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>87</sup> Diane Pamela Smith, “Visual Art and Orality,” *Dharma Deepika* (January 2007).

of science is to build on previous experimental evidence—to test, replicate, and extend it if possible.”<sup>88</sup> This is practiced in many oral cultures, when they retell their stories in the evenings. When they sing the story songs around the fire. The younger members tell stories and are corrected by the elders on forgotten details. Thus, testing is done regularly, communally, with corrections, and long-term memory is greatly strengthened and corporately owned. “The technique is called distributed learning or, more commonly, the spacing effect. People learn at least as much, and retain it much longer, when they distribute—or “space”—their study time than when they concentrate it. Distributed learning, in certain situations, can double the amount we remember later on.”<sup>89</sup>

This continual practice and review creates great familiarity with the stories. “The ancient rabbis exhorted Jews studying the Torah to ‘turn it over, turn it over, because everything is inside of it.’ First you ‘open’ the Story, then you ‘turn it over, turn it over.’ There is a Story — turn, turn, turn. It is the turn of the Story that turns lives back to God. This bad habit of Jesus will lead us to never underestimate the power of story to cultivate the imagination and change the heart. We don’t just read the stories of the Bible; we live in them, and they live in us.”<sup>90</sup>

This was heard in Roberto Sacul’s words in San Marcos, Belize, “I love these stories! First, you get into them and it’s exciting and then you realize they get into you and you have to live like the people in the stories! It’s great!”<sup>91</sup> This is a bedrock principle for discovering the theology which is embedded in the stories, seeing yourself in the story. This is another example of visualization which Roberto experienced. “This is Jesus’

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<sup>88</sup> Benedict Carey, *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where and Why It Happens* (New York: Random House, 2015), 67.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>90</sup> Leonard Sweet, *The Bad Habits of Jesus: Showing Us the Way to Live Right in a World Gone Wrong* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016), 837-841, Kindle.

<sup>91</sup> Personal testimony as heard by the author, Belize, Central America, 2012.

genius. He tells what seems like a simple story and yet, as you encounter it, you find your own self-righteousness coaxed gently out into the open. You aren't just told about your sin. You are almost provoked to enact the very transgression he is discussing.”<sup>92</sup>

When adapting their messages to better serve local learning style, many western pastors and missionaries have witnessed the power of truth being conveyed through full orbed stories more readily than through alliteratively aligned sermons. The process of engaging with truth that convicts and leads to transformative decisions, seems so much greater when delivered in ways appropriate to the culture. These are compounded when delivered in visually stimulating ways; proverbs, illustrations, real life stories or images. As we seek to impact others who may not read, we should look deeper into how they think, act and communicate. Can the messages of eternity be trusted to non-written forms? Would they degrade? Would they morph into something entirely ‘other?’

In consideration of all that has been shared so far, it is therefore logical that an anthropological study of a people group, with a focus on story-based discovery combined with collaged images that connect to the people, are created by the people, and carry the messages of eternity, will communicate clearly, be well understood and easily transferred into the long-term memory of the active participants. We will explore this in the next section.

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<sup>92</sup> Luke Cawley, *The Myth of the Non-Christian: Engaging Atheists, Nominal Christians and the Spiritual but not Religious* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016), 22.

### *Applying the Principles*

“If the brain is a learning machine, then it’s an eccentric one.  
And it performs best when its quirks are exploited.”<sup>93</sup>

#### ...of Visuals

Saussure saw writing as a "visual" copy of speech.<sup>94</sup> Derrida showed that speech does not represent reality any more than writing does. Both speech and writing fail to fully capture reality.<sup>95</sup> What if both fail, then which is better? I suggest a third option, borrowed from Polanyi,<sup>96</sup> which is, experience. Shared communal experience is even better than individual experience. “Stories are exchanged experiences. As a story is told, the picture found in the storyteller’s mind is transferred (with various levels of success) to the minds of others through a full-bodied experience that embraces the mind, the imagination, the emotions, and volition.”<sup>97</sup> Whether it is a story or the mental image passed from storyteller to listener, there must be “an active process between the sign and reader of the sign. It is an exchange between the two that involves some negotiation.”<sup>98</sup> For oral communities, this exchange is negotiated within their communal structures. As applied to the use of visual images with oral learners, they do not see a separation

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<sup>93</sup> Benedict Carey, *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where and Why It Happens* (New York: Random House, 2015), 22.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post Critical Philosophy* (London, UK: Routledge, 2005), 85.

<sup>97</sup> Tom Steffen, *Worldview-based Storying: The Integration of Symbol, Story, and Ritual in the Orality Movement*, MS, 143.

<sup>98</sup> Benedict Carey, *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where and Why It Happens* (New York: Random House, 2015), 38.

between the image and its associated story. Carey goes on to say, “Sound and thought cannot be separated.”<sup>99</sup>

In a similar way, oral learners do not separate listening to Scripture from the practice of Scripture. Wright says,

...the gospels invite us to make this story our own, to live within the narrative in all its twists and turns, to see ourselves among the crowds following Jesus and witnessing his kingdom-bringing work, to see ourselves also in the long-range continuation of that narrative that we call, in fear and trembling (because we know its deep ambiguities), the life of the church.<sup>100</sup>

Oral learners, who have not been taught to dissect word from word with critical literary assessment, listen instead to the story intended as a personal message. They readily see themselves in the stories of Scripture and conversely they see that the truths in the stories must become part of who they become as they listen and live according to the sacred stories.

To better understand how we can trust that these encounters with the Scriptures are more than temporary, we need to look further into the ways they are shared and the impacts that these methods have upon listeners. We will examine their memories and various factors which strengthen their capacities, through recitation, visuals and singing.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>100</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016), Locations 3660-3665, Kindle.

...of Memory

“Using memory changes memory—and for the better.”<sup>101</sup>

One hurdle to overcome for literates is the understanding of the memory capacities of oral learners. As literates, we have no great need to remember anything due to our reliance on technological aids. The Boomers may recall math teachers warning us that we needed to memorize times tables because, “You will not always have a calculator with you!”<sup>102</sup> Those teachers could not have imagined a time when nearly everyone would carry a mini computer around in their pockets. Yet, these technological crutches have also caused our memories to atrophy. We assume that everyone else is like us. Then how could non-educated oral learners possibly remember what we cannot?

Their lack of reliance on technology is the first reason. Timothy Eby, a missionary in Africa, shared that he has personally witnessed non-literate pastors listen to a one hour sermon, then quote it in its entirety.<sup>103</sup> He admitted that he could not perform such a task himself yet it is a regular practice for these pastors. They come ‘into the city’ once a month for supplies. While there, they will visit a church, listen to the sermon and preach that same sermon everywhere they go for the next month. Eby has traveled with these oral pastors often enough to confirm that their memories of the initial sermon remain quite strong. These pastors are presenting a small example of the importance placed by the ancient Jews for internalizing the Scriptures. The rabbinate considered what was retained in memory as superior to what was written: “The written texts of Torah in

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<sup>101</sup> Benedict Carey, *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where and Why It Happens* (New York: Random House, 2015), 40.

<sup>102</sup> An oft-repeated threat in public schools by a multitude of non-visionary teachers.

<sup>103</sup> Phone interview with Rev. Timothy Eby, January 2016.



the Mouth . . . are not Torah at all as long as they remain merely written on inscribed material surfaces; the real inscription of Torah in the Mouth must be in memory.”<sup>104</sup> Prior elucidates further, “The biblical word in their local tongue was mnemonic, whether sung or recited, and addressed to a people who, in those days, were mostly non-literate.”<sup>105</sup>

Gate’s study of memory revealed “...that recitation leads to better articulation, accentuation, pauses, vocal inflections, use of melody and rhythms, as well to better localization, noting peculiarities and meanings in the material...”<sup>106</sup> We ‘hear’ that careful attention to the crafted sounds of the orally delivered message are cues to accurate recall and retelling. To gain a better understanding, let’s look back to a time when memory among literates was more stringently practiced. “Here’s the philosopher Francis Bacon, spelling it out in 1620: ‘If you read a piece of text through twenty times, you will not learn it by heart so easily as if you read it ten times while attempting to recite it from time to time and consulting the text when your memory fails.’”<sup>107</sup> This self-testing practice allows the individual to gauge how well their memory is recalling the content. When it is working well, their confidence grows as they realize growing proficiency in obtaining the ‘Torah in the Mouth.’ “Let’s recall the Bjork’s ‘desirable difficulty’ principle: The harder your brain has to work to dig out a memory, the greater the increase

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<sup>104</sup> Stuart Trevor Yoakum, “The Spoken Word: God, Scripture, and Orality in Missions,” (PhD Diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 89. Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism 200 BCE-400 CE* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 155.

<sup>105</sup> John Mansford Prior, “From Fatalism to Empowerment: Intercultural Hermeneutics Across Generations,” accessed February 12, 2018, 1, [https://repository.divinity.edu.au/1880/1/From\\_Fatalism\\_to\\_Empowerment.pdf](https://repository.divinity.edu.au/1880/1/From_Fatalism_to_Empowerment.pdf).

<sup>106</sup> Arthur I. Gates, *Recitation as a Factor in Memorizing* (New York: Science Press, 1917).

<sup>107</sup> Benedict Carey, *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where and Why It Happens* (New York: Random House, 2015), 83.

in learning (retrieval and storage strength).”<sup>108</sup> The oral learning pastors were actually improving their memories by re-preaching the earlier messages.

Studies demonstrated that older literate adults, of 60-70 years of age, who had previously complained about memory loss were able to improve their memories through recitation and visualization.<sup>109</sup> “No one probably doubts that interest in the exercise of a function favors improvement at it.”<sup>110</sup> Yet, how far can that interest extend? Müller offers an explanation, “The factor of localization comes more effectively into play. One cannot remember the positions of each member of a series of twenty nonsense syllables, but he can remember the position of four to five groups, each being treated as a unit.”<sup>111</sup> Barbara Oakley refers to these as “Chunks.”<sup>112</sup>

These localized chunks of material are a natural way for oral learners to accurately recall and recite content, much as people did during Bacon’s time. Imagine that the message they originally heard contained powerful visual images which were etched into their memory as they listened. To repeat the message then is to refresh those images in their memory, which strengthens what they experienced. The more vivid or unusual the image, the stronger the memory. The same study with older adults

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>109</sup> Latorre Postigo, José Miguel, José Vicente Hernández- Viadel, and Jorge Javier Ricarte Trives. “Efficacy of a Group Memory Training Method for Older Adults Based on Visualization and Association Techniques: A Randomized, Controlled Trial with a Placebo Group,” *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 24, no. 7 (2010): 959.

<sup>110</sup> Arthur I. Gates, *Recitation as a Factor in Memorizing* (New York: Science Press, 1917), 85.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>112</sup> Barbara A. Oakley, *A Mind for Numbers: How to Excel at Math and Science (Even if You Flunked Algebra)* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2014), 64.

demonstrated a sixty percent increase in memory when using visualization.<sup>113</sup> An additional factor favorably impacts the non-literate pastors while they are listening to content which interests them, such as the sermons they listen to ‘in the city.’ As the re-preach those sermons, their immediate use in varied locations increases the difficulty factor, which also strengthens their memory. Carey affirms this, “A simple change in venue improved retrieval strength (memory) by forty percent. Or, as the authors put it, the experiment ‘showed strong recall improvements with variation of environmental context.’”<sup>114</sup> Oral pastors who preach in a circuit of villages actually improve their accuracy with each retelling.

For literate learners, Crow suggests “The addition of text can be a powerful method of altering or fixing the meaning of an image.”<sup>115</sup> A corollary thought can be suggested for oral learners. That the addition of words, be they spoken or sung, also fixes their meaning and memory to the image. A well-crafted image, whether real or imagined can serve as a powerful mnemonic device.

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<sup>113</sup> Latorre Postigo, José Miguel, José Vicente Hernández- Viadel, and Jorge Javier Ricarte Trives. “Efficacy of a Group Memory Training Method for Older Adults Based on Visualization and Association Techniques: A Randomized, Controlled Trial with a Placebo Group,” *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 24, no. 7 (2010): 964.

<sup>114</sup> Benedict Carey, *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where and Why It Happens* (New York: Random House, 2015), 62.

<sup>115</sup> David Crow, *Visible Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics in the Visual Arts* (London, UK: AVA Publishing, 2016), 86.

...of Singing

“Singing, in every culture, is a fundamental method of communication.”<sup>116</sup>

To the point of singing as a memory tool. “Singing constitutes the most widespread mode of musical expression. All individuals across cultures have taken part in singing in some form. This pleasurable experience is most likely rooted in the early exposure to maternal singing, which is swiftly imitated by the infant.”<sup>117</sup> It is perhaps the earliest positive memory for many people, that of their mother singing to them. It is also such a natural action to repeat that it is often seen in young children emulating as they play with dolls or younger children. “It is a natural progression from discussing orality to thinking about music and singing. Music research reinforces Ong’s perspective that orality is foundational.”<sup>118</sup> Singing is part of who we are at our core. A group from Burundi who attended an orality training in Nairobi, Kenya demonstrated this quite well. Singing was foremost in their communication style. They created songs about content in the seminar. “The tune and text of a song are typically heard and learned together. Accordingly, they are expected to leave memory traces that are equally familiar and recoverable.”<sup>119</sup> God understands these memory traces. Deuteronomy 32 records a forty-three verse song which God instructs Moses to teach to the people as “this song will

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<sup>116</sup> H. Colleen Butcher, “Worship as Playground: Living the Song-Story of God,” (DMin. Dissertation, George Fox University, 2013), 12.

<sup>117</sup> Isabelle Peretz, Lise Gagnon, Sylvie Hebert, and Joel Macoir, “Singing in the Brain: Insights from Cognitive Neuropsychology,” *Music Perception* 21, no. 3 (2004): 373-390, <http://mp.ucpress.edu/content/21/3/373>.

<sup>118</sup> Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), 20.

<sup>119</sup> Isabelle Peretz, Lise Gagnon, Sylvie Hebert, and Joel Macoir, “Singing in the Brain: Insights from Cognitive Neuropsychology,” *Music Perception* 21, no. 3 (2004): 377, <http://mp.ucpress.edu/content/21/3/373>.

testify against them, because it will not be forgotten by their descendants.”<sup>120</sup> This song serves not just as a testimony against the people but as a ‘Lyrical Table of Contents’<sup>121</sup> (LToC) of the many stories in which God related important truths to His people. Depending upon how you count the individual stories, there are at least thirty unique stories in these lyrics which God commanded Moses to teach to the people. God knew that the combination of musical accompaniment plus familiar stories would create this ‘Lyrical Table of Contents’ which would be easily remembered.

Another example of this mnemonic being utilized in Scripture is found in Psalm 78. The first four verses set the stage.

My people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth.  
I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old—things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us.  
We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.<sup>122</sup>

Then verse by verse, this song offers a running historical record of many of the important lessons which should never be forgotten as they outline both the good and the bad of the nation’s relationship with God. There are more than two dozen different memory markers in this Lyrical Table of Contents. After having sung this ballad, it would not have been difficult for children or grandchildren to have requested another telling of any one of the individual stories mentioned. The following are some of those referenced stories:

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<sup>120</sup> Deuteronomy 31:21 (NIV).

<sup>121</sup> “Lyrical Table of Contents” (LToC) Phrase coined by the author to help us think and understand those with more epic memories and to differently about content already existing when viewed through the eyes and ears of Oral Learners.

<sup>122</sup> Psalm 78:1-4 (NIV).

## PSALM 78 STORY REFERENCES

Reference	Verse	Story
#1	2	Job 38-41
#2	5	Exodus 19-20
#3	5	Deuteronomy 6
#4	6	Exodus 7-15
#5	6	Deuteronomy 4
#6	7	Deuteronomy 5
#7	8	Exodus 32
#8	9	Judges 20:39
#9	12	Exodus 7:1
#10	14	Exodus 13
#11	15	Exodus 17
#12	18	Numbers 11
#13	21	Numbers 11
#14	24	Numbers 11
#15	27	Numbers 11
#16	32	Numbers 14
#17	44	Exodus 7
#18	45	Exodus 8
#19	46	Exodus 10
#20	47	Exodus 9
#21	49	Exodus 11
#22	53	Exodus 14
#23	54	Numbers 31
#24	55	Numbers 31 – 36
#25	58	1 Kings 3
#26	61	1 Samuel 4
#27	62	1 Samuel 4
#28	63	Numbers 11
#29	64	1 Samuel 22
#30	70	1 Samuel 16
#31	71	2 Samuel 2
#32	72	1 Kings 9:4

Table 2

In more recent times, “Grant Lovejoy tells how a group of storytellers he worked with in Africa created a chant that listed the names of sixty Old Testament stories in chronological order and through it were able to maintain the chronological accuracy of

the stories.”<sup>123</sup> These storytellers created their own Lyrical Table of Contents and proved that it works. For those who may be skeptical as to the practicality of remembering such long songs with so many individual pieces, perhaps you could participate in a small exercise? Could you recite the twenty-six letters in the English alphabet...without recalling the melodic tune with which you likely learned them? Clearly, singing is another mnemonic device which deeply embeds into our memory.

Listening to such stories sung by a psalmist would no doubt bring many images into the minds of the audience. These mental images may also serve as powerful memory markers. “Imagery helps us perceive and grasp thoughts, ideas, and truth in a tactile and tacit manner. It also allows us to imagine in our minds abstract concepts like discipleship. Images put flesh on the bones of ideas and values; they make concrete the abstract, rendering them accessible.”<sup>124</sup> “They assert that these symbols, ‘often describe more accurately than words concepts such as God, Christ, salvation, atonement, and eternity.’”<sup>125</sup> An image of a communion cup is not just a cup to believers, nor is an image of a baptismal pool simply a deep wading pool. The images have been reframed and co-opted by the faith to carry new meanings.

These embedded biblical examples cause this author to wonder if such epic songs were part of the repertoire of Ezra when he was chosen to return to Israel from Babylon. “...He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel,

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<sup>123</sup> Paul F. Koehler, *Telling God's Stories with Power: Biblical Storytelling in Oral Cultures*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library Publishers, 2010), 105.

<sup>124</sup> Arthur Asa Berger, *Seeing is Believing: An Introduction to Visual Communication* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1998), 2.

<sup>125</sup> Franklin M. Segler and Randall Bradley, *Christian Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 198.

had given...”<sup>126</sup> It could be interesting to find out the etymology of the meaning of the expression “well versed.” If it is just to know well the law what is written that is fine; however, if it’s original intent was that the person knew well the *verses* of the song which carried the messages from God, then it could offer additional insight into orality. Perhaps one day we will know.

### ...of Visual Graphic Writing

“Symbol conveys meaning by displaying, not by telling.”<sup>127</sup>

Are there links between visual images which may help bridge the communication gaps between literate and oral learners? Globally, we are becoming more and more visual in our communications. Abbreviations and emojis are acceptable for casual conversations. The use of social media not only ignores countries political and geographical boundaries<sup>128</sup> but speeds past them as a newly formed ‘SWAT’ team of Snapchat, WhatsApp and Twitter. These tools have proven highly effective in reframing how we communicate, even as literates. Along the way, the reductionist factor of these tools is bringing us closer to a return to the hieroglyphic age of image-based communication. By attempting to say more with less, we have created new language expressions. Abbreviations allow us to say more within the confines of the one hundred-forty character Twittersphere. Emojis go beyond that by expressing emotions through

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<sup>126</sup> Ezra 7:6 (NIV).

<sup>127</sup> Tom Steffen, *Worldview-based Storying: The Integration of Symbol, Story, and Ritual in the Orality Movement*, MS, 131.

<sup>128</sup> Parag Khanna, *Connectography: Mapping the Future of Global Civilization* (New York: Random House, 2017), location 5804, Kindle Edition.



images. While it may be a circuitous route, we are returning to a non-alphabet based literacy. We are living in the re-emergence of an oral communication culture, or digital, <sup>129</sup> this one heavily supported by adaptive technology. This is good news for those who communicate orally as it is building a link with the literates. A light-hearted example of the shift society is making can be seen in the following Facebook posts <sup>130</sup>:



Figure 9:  
Emojis as Hieroglyphics

<sup>129</sup> Samuel E. Chiang, "Disciple Making in the Digital Era: Editor's Notes," *Orality Journal* 2, no. 1 (2013): 7.

<sup>130</sup> Facebook Search/Old Timers, accessed December 21, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/OldtimersPage/videos/466651813679410/>.

One example of this newer language being used to communicate a rather heartfelt message is included below.<sup>131</sup>

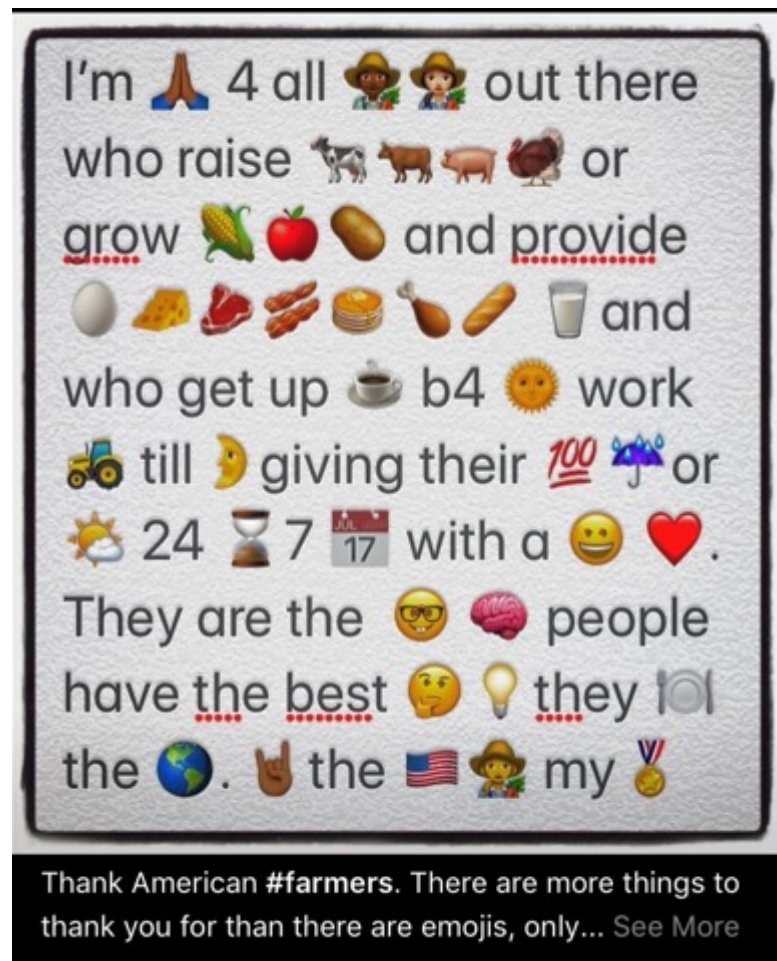


Figure 10:  
Prayer for the American Farmer

Recently, missionary friends in Singapore<sup>132</sup> used emojis from WhatsApp to create a graphic, wordless quiz for the story of Jonah. Adults and children alike eagerly engaged in ordering the emoji characters to match the flow of the story.

<sup>131</sup> Facebook Search/farmers, accessed November 23, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=%23farmers>.

<sup>132</sup> Names withheld for security purposes.



Figure 11:  
'WhatsApp' Story of Job

This couple lives in a modern melting pot of people, cultures, languages and literacies. They are embracing new ways to communicate in mixed settings with half a dozen languages and friends who range from highly literate Ph.D. candidates to non-literate domestic workers. They are an example of efforts which may lessen the gap between literate and oral learners, and they used pictures to do so. They are finding common ground rather than seeking to convert them into literates. It may be possible that while we endeavor to communicate with oral learners, they may become our teachers.

With continual research in this field and collaborative efforts between literate teachers and oral learners to develop, test and modify new teaching tools and methodologies, two things should occur. The first is that the communication gap between literate and oral communicators should lessen, with greater abilities to understand each other's unique ways of thinking and expressing their ideas and beliefs. The second is that the vast stores of knowledge presently limited to largely written means will be more

easily converted into oral friendly means. This will bring a new level of enthusiasm for the literate teachers seeking to share their knowledge and resources. It will also bring about the empowerment of a great number of people who are primary oral learners, who have previously not had access or the ability to share with those in their social networks.

In light of these targets, a number of ‘Visual Theology’ StudyMaps have been developed which can be supported by local wisdom, Bible stories and songs, and are capable of being tailored to local cultural context, in both artistic style and content. These will essentially be Visual Table of Contents<sup>133</sup> (VToC). The VToC serves as a non-linear syllabus and teaching device, anchoring the content for accuracy, integrity and long-term memory. Additionally, we will explore adaptations of this concept addressed to obstacles and opportunities for specific audiences.



Figure 12:  
Narrative, Visual Oral Training Process<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Visual Table of Contents, (VToC), phrase coined by the author.

<sup>134</sup> Original watercolor by Abby Salazar, created to visually express the intent of this Narrative, Visual, Oral Training process. A missionary studies local culture, learns from them and adapts the message of the story he loves to tell into forms which easily spread from person to person.

## A Rebirth of Hieroglyphics as Visual Teaching Tools

“What has been will be again,  
what has been done will be done again;  
there is nothing new under the sun.”<sup>135</sup>

Most people are not familiar with ‘Orality’ as a concept nor oral learners as indicative of a major learning style. Hopefully, this paper has given an opportunity to think about the importance of understanding key learning differences between primary literate learners and those who prefer or need to learn through oral and oral/visual means. What follows is more evidence to help frame a better understanding of how we can apply what has been learned and discovered so far in ways that will benefit our communications with primary and secondary oral learners.

Missional efforts in this field are growing rapidly, such that we will most certainly see continued improvements in the next few years. Hopefully, such improvements will continue to expand into more educational institutions and major global ministries.

### *Customizing Local Content Curriculum*

Around the world, people of every culture prefer their own food. While it can be fun to travel and sample delicacies and ‘other dishes’ with unpronounceable names or ingredients, it is always good to get back to one’s home meals. A pastor in Mumbai, India expressed this when recalling three months he spent in England. Learning from prior visits there he took a rather large bag of strong cayenne chutney with him, just to “add flavor of the tasteless English food a bit.” When his spice bag was emptied far too soon,

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<sup>135</sup> Ecclesiastes 1:9 (NIV).

he began counting the days until he could go back to his country to get a good home-cooked meal! Since most of us share his preference for food the way we know it at home, is it any surprise that learning styles might also be ‘home grown.?’

### ...Through Need Driven Curriculum to Motivate Learners

A revolution is needed. What King Thamus feared has come to pass. Thoth promised augmented memory and amplified wisdom. King Thamus decided that his subjects were better off without this particular transformation. Anticipating Marshall McLuhan’s notion that new technologies amputate as much as they amplify, Thamus realized that writing would actually destroy memory by making it dependent on external marks.”<sup>136</sup> The best we can approximate is that we have greatly amplified knowledge but not our memories. Our memories grow shorter every time we “Google.”

Writing will never and should never go away. However, we have elevated one technique to such a degree that it appears to be the only way to learn or communicate. We govern ourselves by ourselves and in doing so have lost sight of those not reading our literature. “Most of the world communicates by words, verbally spoken.”<sup>137</sup>

We should not think that non-literates only live in rural areas. As Khanna points out, “By 2030, more than seventy percent of the world’s people will live in cities, with most of them located within fifty miles of the sea.” We need to understand and strategize the reality of our cities. The non-literates who used to live in rural areas have migrated

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<sup>136</sup> Erik Davis, *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic, Mysticism in the Age of Information* (New York: Harmony Books, 1998), 15.

<sup>137</sup> David Claydon, ed., “Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 54, Making Disciples of Oral Learners,” 2004, 11, [http://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP54\\_IG25.pdf](http://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP54_IG25.pdf).

into our cities yet are ill-equipped to survive in areas where print is primary. "Our culture is a culture of cities, and without cities we could not conceivably have enjoyed the enormous scientific, economic, and political advances of the Enlightenment. Cities are also the heart of the modern nation state, and every country that modernizes does so by mass migration from country to city."<sup>138</sup>

We need translators of language and communication styles. Translators who understand both 'languages' and honor both equally, without condescending. Non-literates can learn to read. Literates can also learn to communicate in ways which oral communicators will understand and greatly appreciate.

Leonard Sweet stated that the reason the rich man in Luke 16 was sent to Hades was not that he did not understand the need to care for his brothers, but that "...he did not realize how many brothers he had. He had failed to treat Lazarus like a brother."<sup>139</sup> The Church may be doing the same when we overlook the needs of our oral brothers and sisters. Many schools are expanding by extension education; yet what they are extending in many cases is the same literate based content. We need translators in the extension schools who have the mental acuity to convert literate material into appropriate oral delivery models. In the next section, we will examine various examples of how literate materials may be offered in more oral friendly ways.

Garoian and Gaudelius explain this as those who "...understand visual culture as spectacle pedagogy because 'it has the power to teach us what and how to see and think'

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<sup>138</sup> Wilfred M. McClay, *Why Place Matters: Geography, Identity, and Civic Life in Modern America* (New York: Encounter Books, 2014), 149.

<sup>139</sup> Leonard Sweet, "Lazarus and the Rich Man," Lecture, Summer Advance, Jupiter Hotel, Portland, Oregon, June 21, 2016.



in contemporary societies; and simultaneously, we can challenge the dominant practices in visual culture by developing an embodied critical pedagogy of collage, montage, assemblage, installation and performance art, by playing disjunctive experiences and creating dissonant spaces for difference.”<sup>140</sup>

Oral learners in Africa demonstrated the effectiveness of this when taught the foundational beliefs of their denomination through the use of a StudyMap<sup>141</sup> of basic Christian Beliefs (see figure below). Although they could not read either the Bible or the Church’s official Manual, they viewed the images on the StudyMap while listening to Scriptures and explanations. The sixteen doctrinal statements and accompanying images were easily learned and internalized. When a General Superintendent visited to ordain some of these candidates, he queried if these non-literate pastors really knew the doctrines. A District leader called one of the candidates, asking him to recite all sixteen of the Beliefs. This oral learning pastor immediately and accurately recalled all sixteen, by number, image, Scripture and explanation. The duly impressed General Superintendent confessed that he could not perform the same feat!

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<sup>140</sup> C. R. Garoian and Y. M. Gaudelius, *Spectacle Pedagogy: Art, Politics and Visual Culture*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), 27.

<sup>141</sup> Stéphane Tibi, “StudyMaps,” StudyMaps, accessed January 4, 2016, <http://www.studymaps.org/files/jpgs/BasicChristianBeliefsEnglish.jpg>.



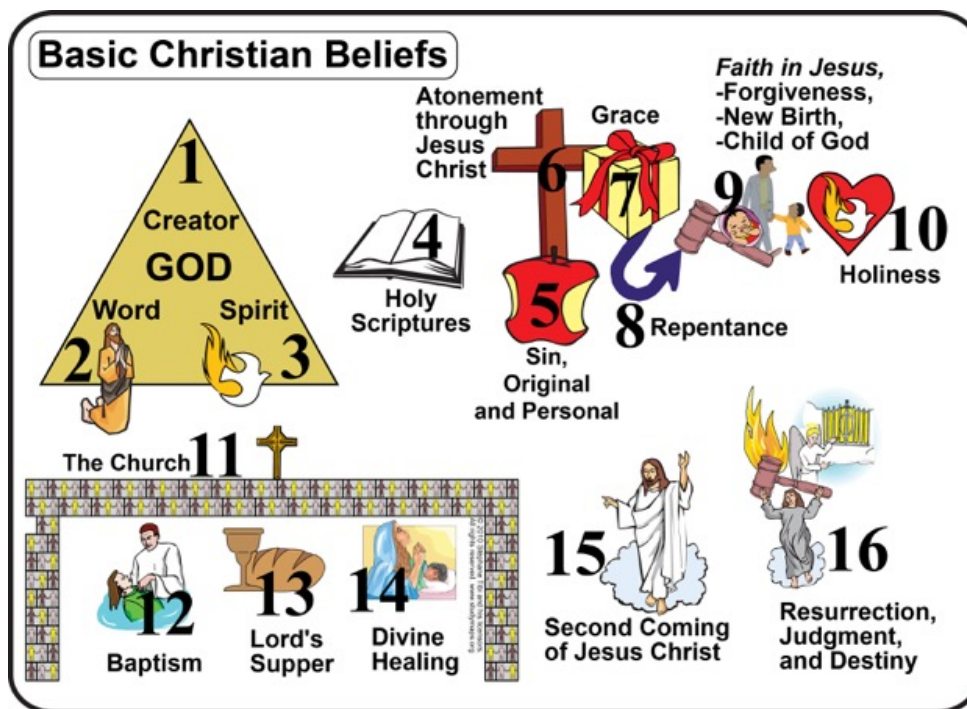


Figure 13:  
Basic Christian Beliefs StudyMap<sup>142</sup>

McKinney proposes,

The question is not whether storytelling is a return to our ancient roots or a move toward a cutting edge, forward thinking expression of our faith. The weightier question is whether or not the church is ready to return to storytelling and embrace the use of image, metaphor and narrative as a legitimate method of sharing the gospel story with the world.<sup>143</sup>

Sweet adds, "If only disciples of Jesus were as incarnational as viruses, who continually adapt and combine to thrive in new environments."<sup>144</sup> The revival of oral Bible storytelling is one such adaptation. This will be enhanced even further by reinstituting the

<sup>142</sup> Stéphane Tibi, "StudyMaps," StudyMaps, accessed January 4, 2016, <http://www.studymaps.org/files/jpgs/BasicChristianBeliefsEnglish.jpg>.

<sup>143</sup> Rick McKinney, "Using Storytelling (Including Image, Metaphor and Narrative) in Cross-Generational, Cross-cultural Twenty-First Century Evangelism." (DMin. Dissertation, George Fox University, 2014), 12.

<sup>144</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *Me and We: God's New Social Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), location 3080, Kindle.

intentional use of images into ‘Narrative Based Visual Theology.’<sup>145</sup> Simmons says, “Story is a form of mental imprint.” Adding visuals which are culturally appropriate is like adding color to the mental imprint. Each step of improvement increases the strength of memory.

During 2016, various ethnic groups in Australia, New Zealand and Myanmar found ready acceptance of images when used to illustrate, understand and even teach theology.<sup>146</sup> The groups engaged with visual images, which were accompanied by descriptive words as a test, to see if they matched. They discovered that a couple of the images seemed incomplete. Given the freedom to make any changes they wanted, it was interesting to see that one Australian group chose the image of a tree to represent The Church. (see below) Fortey would have expected this,

Humans instinctively embrace trees as symbols. In nearly all religions the tree of life is a metaphor for commonality of descent. Roots extend to a dark underworld, branches to celestial paradise. The tree of Jesse validates the lineage of Christ. The fruit of the tree of Good and Evil brings sin into the world, and with it the possibility of salvation. Trees are always at the heart of the matter.<sup>147</sup>

This group did indeed put the tree at the heart of the matter, using it as the primary image for The Church. The foundational activities of the people who make up the church were scattered among its branches, indicating their uniqueness’ as well as relationships to the whole. They preferred a tree over a building because a tree spoke to them of life.

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<sup>145</sup> Descriptive term to define the teaching model being developed.

<sup>146</sup> Raymond Neu, “Oral Learners and Visuals: A Match Made in Heaven?” Academic Paper, George Fox University, 2016.

<sup>147</sup> Richard A. Fortey, *The Wood for the Trees: The Long View of Nature from a Small Wood*, (London, UK: William Collins, 2016), 111.

Sweet points out that the Bible has trees for bookends. The trees for food in the Garden of Paradise including the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life, which shows up again in Revelation, amid the city of God.<sup>148</sup> We should not forget the trees along the River of Life, which bear fruit every month and whose leaves bring healing to the nations.<sup>149</sup> Trees have been with us from the beginning. Many cultures are drawn to trees. For those cultures who use trees as sacred objects, and for those who associate significance to trees as symbols, the mere image of a tree may evoke strong thoughts connected to those beliefs.



Figure 14:  
Church as a Tree

<sup>148</sup> Leonard I. Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus: A Theography* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 46.

<sup>149</sup> Revelations 22:1-2 (NIV)

(“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”)

Can the image of a tree teach theology? It can be a good starting place for reminding oral learners what their theology is, then supporting the concepts illustrated in the images with the stories from which the images are derived. The stories contain the theology. The images are mnemonics for the stories. Yair Pinto, et al. demonstrated that “...a good cue, as one taken from an image, even with little actual attention to the material at the time of the presentation serves as a strong reminder of the content.”<sup>150</sup>

Below is a redesigned StudyMap adapted in southern Australia. Here they choose large rocks because this spoke to them of strength, protection and permanence. Stéphane Tibi, creator of the original StudyMap applauded their efforts because they comprehended and reframed the overall image, then made it their own.

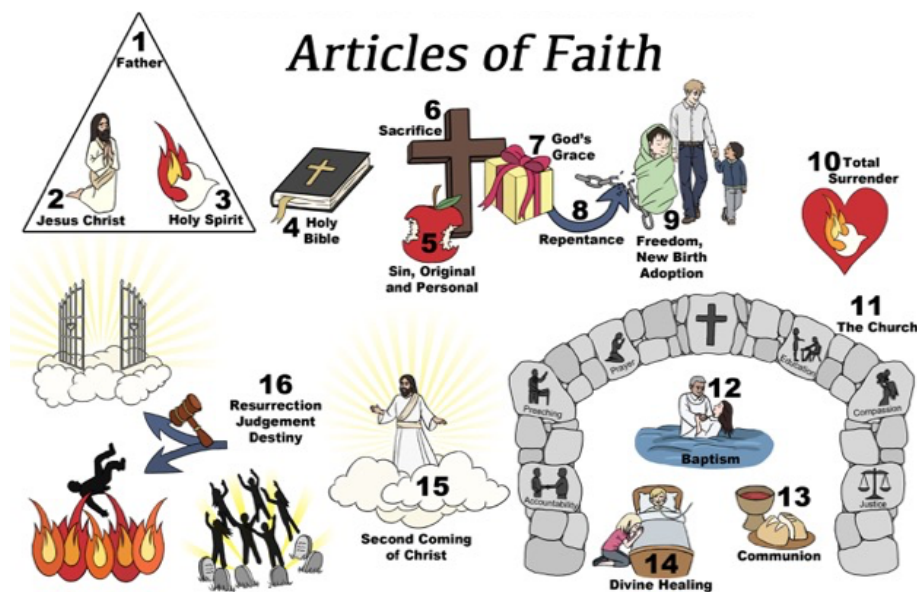


Figure 15:  
Australia 'Church as Rock'<sup>151</sup>

<sup>150</sup> Yair Pinto et al., "Conscious Visual Memory with Minimal Attention," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 146, no 2, (2017): 220, doi:10.1037/xge0000255.

<sup>151</sup> Created by Chris Northey, teacher, and Emma, student, Australia, February 2016.

...Through Creating Communal, Collaborative Cohorts

“One man cannot build a town.”<sup>152</sup>

What does collaborative efforts to ‘speak one another’s language’ look like? It means literate teachers with a basket full of principles rather than lesson plans. It means becoming anthropologists first, culturally aware thinkers next and theologians last. It means being willing to allow those being taught to explore the principles and express their thoughts in any number of forms except written alphabet. It means acknowledging and allowing for variations of interpretation based on worldview and cultural contextualization. It means changing our concept of teaching. The Hebrew word ‘lamad’ means to teach. Its root means to learn.<sup>153</sup> To teach is to learn. It means engaging in a three-way dance where we bring a part, the culture we are trying to reach brings a part and the Holy Spirit brings a part. Until all three parts are discovered together, there can be no true collaborative knowledge. It means going into a teaching session without knowing what will be the outcome. It means acknowledging that mystery still exists and that we cannot plumb its depths without learning from other cultures.

We need each other’s literacies. In the same way that an oral learner needs a literate person to read a printed warning sign, so the literate needs the oral learner to reveal meanings of their cultural stories. Cultures have unique clothing and designs,

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<sup>152</sup> Albin Korem and Mawutodzi Kodzo Abissath, *Traditional Wisdom in African Proverbs: A Collection of 2000 Proverbs from 41 African Countries* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 2007), 16.

<sup>153</sup> Roy B. Zuck, “Hebrew Words for ‘Teach,’” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 121: 228-235 (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1964), accessed April 16, 2017, [http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted\\_hildebrandt/otesources/20-proverbs/text/articles/zuck-provteach-bsac.htm](http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/otesources/20-proverbs/text/articles/zuck-provteach-bsac.htm).

customs and ritual, social practices and art. In Western culture, tattoos have become the new cave paintings. These mobile canvases tell uniquely personal stories. What do aboriginal tattoos and designs mean? Inquiry on both sides could reveal that the artist and the theologian are one and the same.

We should seek to understand what each culture values, then learn why they hold those values. We need to discover the stories, songs and proverbs that accompany each value, then compare those with Scripture. We may find traces of the Trinity<sup>154</sup> already embedded within. “Stories are actually peculiarly good at modifying or subverting other stories and their worldviews.”<sup>155</sup> We can use those stories to explore foundational beliefs and offer new stories to nudge people closer to Christ.

Here’s some sage advice:

Debrief with interpretive small groups. Don’t just send everybody home when you’re done. Reserve...(time)...at the end of the project to collectively interpret what people have experienced. Form small groups where participants can share honestly. Ensure that at least one member of each group is well prepared to guide the discussion and to help participants make sense of what it all means for them.<sup>156</sup>

In many world areas, hospitality is a must. If there is no time for gathering around a cup of tea or coffee, there is no relationship. If there is no relationship, there is nothing to be done and nothing to be learned. Many benefits flow from listening, reflecting and ‘settling’ in collaborative small groups who are living and learning together.

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<sup>154</sup> Peter J. Leithart, *Traces of the Trinity: Signs of God in Creation and Human Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015), 135.

<sup>155</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London, UK: SPCK, 2013), 39-40.

<sup>156</sup> Luke Cawley, *The Myth of the Non-Christian: Engaging Atheists, Nominal Christians and the Spiritual but not Religious* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016), 99.

Another aspect for oral learners is found in that while listeners may apply discovered truths in various ways, they do not do so in a vacuum. “The story is not viewed or listened to in isolation but in a community, and it generates learning and knowledge that lasts.”<sup>157</sup> The truths within the story are examined through corporate discovery around a shared story. The listeners become willing participants. Listening becomes a process of internalizing the story. The community reinforces the impact of the story. The combination of oral storytelling, drama, and community engagement are examples of what Olshansky calls transmediation. “Sign systems—such as art, music, drama, mathematics, and language— are modes of communication. Transmediation is the notion of transference of information from one system of communication to another.”<sup>158</sup> Transmediation may also be referred to as multimodal communication. The use of various communication styles simultaneously conveys a fuller message while reinforcing its memory and value.

Artifacts could be created to commemorate the unique discoveries unearthed together. These should flow from within the culture. In this way, the local culture would be honored and the gap between literates and oral learners would continue to shrink. This type of engaged, communal learning is very valuable.

Call and response is another popular feature of oral communication which engages the audience as a community. Selective repeated words evolve into chants, slogans, mottos, and may even become mantras building significant impact into the community. Yet these words are not just simple slogans. When birthed from within a

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<sup>157</sup> W. Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London, UK: Pimlico, 1999), 85.

<sup>158</sup> Abby Newland, “Engaging Students through Image and Word,” *Art Education* 66, no. 2 (2013): 50.

knowledge and heart of the local culture, these words offer evidence of higher mental functions which are “...social in origin and complex and hierarchical in their structure and they all are based on a complex system of methods and means...”<sup>159</sup> Musical call and response is a powerful teaching time, as the emotions are engaged, spirits are united and a moment is collectively created in a way that is communal, individual and fun. “Language is a perfect example of higher mental function, especially with regard to most cultural aspects of language.”<sup>160</sup>

At the International Orality Network<sup>161</sup> in Houston, Texas, the idea was promoted that our understanding of oral learners being inferior to literates is backwards. Oral communication is actually a more complex integrated skillset than writing. Those who memorize, tell and perform the stories have this skillset. These performances are communally held, delivered, and critiqued. Ong stated, “Oral cultures indeed produce powerful and beautiful verbal performances of high artistic worth.”<sup>162</sup> Okoth Okumbo expressed, “The oral artist makes subtle insinuations and illusions whose understanding requires a high degree of familiarity with the history, culture, and social semiotics of the artist’s community.”<sup>163</sup> Each of these factors raise the levels of both performance and

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<sup>159</sup> A. R. Luria, *The Working Brain: An Introduction to Neuropsychology* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1973), 30.

<sup>160</sup> Bella Kotik-Friedgut et al. “A Lurian Systemic-Dynamic Approach to Teaching Illiterate Adults a New Language with Literacy,” *Psychology & Neuroscience* 7, no. 4 (June 2014): 494, <http://psycnet.apa.org/record/2014-56250-008>.

<sup>161</sup> Rev. Raymond Neu, “Workshop: Introduction to Orality,” First Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, September 12, 2016.

<sup>162</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London, UK: Methuen, 1982), 15.

<sup>163</sup> Okoth Okumbo, ed., *Understanding Oral Literature* (Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 1995), 21.



enjoyment to a communally shared experience not easily equaled in any format. Claydon explains part of the reason these oral performances are so powerful, “...oral learners ‘enter’ the story and as they absorb sensory data they live the story in the present tense – seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and feeling what the persons in the story are experiencing.”<sup>164</sup> A final factor to add for consideration of how deeply these oral performances intimately connect body and soul is that many of the stories are from their ancestors. When oral learners listen to these powerfully evocative stories, they are not passively listening to foreign words from an author they do not know. They are also hearing, seeing and re-living the very words, character and spirit of their ancestors, who now come alive again with a new purpose.

The storyteller is an orator. Sheard says, “Ultimately, storytelling involves showing the listener an experience.”<sup>165</sup> The storyteller gains control over the listeners by the delivery of the story. The story, not the storyteller is the center of the attention. As the storyteller engages the audience through vocal intonations, gestures, glances, timing, emotion and energy, time is suspended. Each spoken word, utterance, breath and pause lending to the drama that is unfolding. The emotions of the characters are becoming the emotions of the audience as delivered and fueled from the storyteller. “Stories ‘arouse interest and feeling.’”<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> David Claydon, ed., “Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 54, Making Disciples of Oral Learners,” 2004, 22, [http://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP54\\_IG25.pdf](http://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP54_IG25.pdf).

<sup>165</sup> Daniel Sheard, “Preaching in the *Hear* and Now: Justification, Development and Assessment of ‘Parabolic Engagement’ Pedagogy in French-Speaking Missionary Settings,” (PhD. Dissertation, University of Wales, 2005), 189.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

“The oral artist makes subtle insinuations and illusions whose understanding requires a high degree of familiarity with the history, culture and social semiotics of the artist’s community.”<sup>167</sup> The story comes alive in the performance of retelling and in the ears, minds, and hearts of the listeners. For traditional formal storytelling, that is enough. Spiritually driven messengers carrying God’s Word desire more. They engage the audience in discussion about the characters, their interactions, motives, choices and their applications of the story. Through the discussion, listeners become active participants. The story now finds roots in their own lives. This can be frightening or exciting; life altering or empowering.

As oral people see that their own learning and communication system is being recognised and affirmed, they become enthusiastic about using it to express and teach their Christian faith. This helps them to grow in their knowledge and boosts their confidence to be able to teach others. A marvelous cycle of increasing spiritual growth and ability is established, which should be evaluated and encouraged.<sup>168</sup>

These results would readily be agreed upon by educational institutions as goals and objectives they wish to reach. There exists however, a cavernous gap between this desire and the belief that these can be reached without relying on literacy. Our schools face challenges when considering changes as they have alumni, donors, accreditation boards<sup>169</sup> and other competitive schools clamoring as institutional competition is at an all-time high.

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<sup>167</sup> A. Bukenya, W.M. Kabira and O. Okombo, eds., *Understanding Oral Literature* (Nairobi, Kenya: Nairobi University Press, 1995), 21.

<sup>168</sup> Harry Box, *Don't Throw the Book at Them: Communicating the Christian Message to People Who Don't Read* (William Carey Library, 2014), locations 2779-2781, Kindle.

<sup>169</sup> Dr. Mark Fuller, “Reshaping Bible Colleges,” interview by author, November 28, 2016,

The ‘Threat of Losing Accreditation’ is a barrier quickly thrown into the fray when talking to most educators about modifying curriculum to meet the needs of oral learners. Dr. Mark Fuller, who was recruited by Ohio Christian University, to help shape an entirely new form of Bible college, shared that he

Every great invention is invented only once. After that, it is all about refining the original idea. That is where our schools find themselves today. There are those who feel that everything has already been said, written, recorded and copyrighted. There's nothing new under the sun and orality certainly isn't new. What is new is the understanding that oral learners learn differently than literate learners. When teaching is offered in the manner preferred by students, better results are produced. Schuller informs us regarding visual aids as pictures, "...convey a much more real and concrete impression than words. Nothing approaches the effectiveness of pictures as a communication medium which to some degree can overcome language and cultural barriers around the world. This is one sense in which pictures can be considered a universal language."<sup>170</sup> Picture do tell stories. The question remains, 'Which story?' Both the creator of a visual image and the viewer need to be able to agree on what the image is 'saying', otherwise true communication has not occurred. O'Neil quotes David Lewis, "Their world is saturated with images, moving and still, alone and in all manner of hybrid combinations with text and sounds...Competence with images is now a prerequisite of competence in life."<sup>171</sup>

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is learning that this is not necessarily the case. He admits for many schools, it is a convenient and confusing tactic, one which shifts the focus away from the school to the mysterious Accreditation Board.

<sup>170</sup> W. A. Wittich and F. Schuller, *Audio-Visual Materials: Their Nature and Use* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 73.

<sup>171</sup> David Lewis, *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks: Picturing Text* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 59-60.

*Creating Culturally Adaptive Visual Mnemonics*

Claude Levi-Strauss declared that “objects are ‘goods-to-think-with.’” Sweet adds, “Everything you touch, every material thing, is saturated with symbolic meaning of things is not found in the things themselves, but in the stories of the things.”<sup>172</sup> The ancient Hebrews marked the doorposts of their homes with blood. To an uninitiated observer, this is simply gross, unsightly and unsanitary. To the one who knows the story behind these actions, the image is powerful. It speaks of the continuing faith in a God who performed and still performs miracles on behalf of devoted followers.

To the unaware, a cluster of old herbs nailed onto a gate, doorpost or the corner of a bed might seem like a faded memory of an earlier romantic notion. Yet, to those aware of cultural practices, they would see evidence of beliefs in herbalist medicines, more commonly known as ‘witch doctors.’ The herbs would inform a visiting pastor that there is a conflict of beliefs in this home.<sup>173</sup> Reading visual images requires being schooled in the culture and practices from which the image is created. This is explained by Steffen, “Human memory is fragile. We are prone to forget. When this happens, former understanding of a symbol may be totally or partially lost, or the symbol can easily succumb to syncretism.”<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Mother Tongue: How our Heritage Shapes Our Legacy* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2017), xviii-xix.

<sup>173</sup> Observed by personal experiences of the author as a missionary in numerous homes in countries such as Belize, Jamaica, India, Nepal and Romania.

<sup>174</sup> Tom Steffen, *Worldview-based Storying: The Integration of Symbol, Story, and Ritual in the Orality Movement*, MS, 129.

Missionaries are anthropologists. They study the people they wish to reach. They often are on the cutting edge, seeking, discovering or creating new ways to express the sacred. Missionaries also collect all sorts of objects which may appear odd but to the people who created them, they are very meaningful. Could these objects hold any benefit beyond merely being a strange artifact? As Davis says, “What is needed are alien ethnographers, those who can, without simply affirming or denouncing, document the uncanny valley that we know as human culture.”<sup>175</sup> Missionaries serve as these ‘alien ethnographers,’ translating and reframing significant objects into spiritually defined teaching tools. When villagers accept the reframing, they have taken an important step of taking it back into their culture with the new meaning. “One thinks of Goethe’s famous adage, translated as, ‘What you have inherited from your fathers, you must earn or appropriate for yourself, and only then will it be yours’”.<sup>176</sup>

Peruvian Indians have long practiced storytelling through the art of gourd carving. Dating back as far as 4,000 years, this form of storytelling was maintained when new content was delivered by missionaries. One example of appropriating new content with older practices is shown below on this ‘Story Gourd.’<sup>177</sup> The numbered panels depict different Bible stories.

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<sup>175</sup> Erik Davis, *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2015), location 145, Kindle.

<sup>176</sup> Wilfred M McClay, *Why Place Matters: Geography, Identity, and Civic Life in Modern America* (New York: Encounter Books, 2014), 256.

<sup>177</sup> Briahanna Brown, “A Look Behind the Peruvian Art of Gourd Carving,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 24, 2015, accessed December 12, 2016, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/peruvian-art-gourd-carving-180955656/>.



Figure 16:  
Peruvian Story Gourd Carving

Davis expressed it this way, "...spiritual imagination seizes information technology for its own purposes. In this sense, technologies of communication are always, at least potentially, technologies of the sacred, simply because the ideas and experiences of the sacred have always informed human communication."<sup>178</sup>

The Peruvian Indians adopted the sacred by including them in their technique of gourd carving. If we remain insistent that oral learners must become literate, then we are robbing them of what could have been inherited from their fathers. Many cultures are losing their oral roots, due to widespread pressure to 'measure up' by becoming literate.

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<sup>178</sup> Erik Davis, *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (Berkeley, CA, North Atlantic Books. 2015), location 316, Kindle.

One such strategy in educational schemes has been the sponsorship of foreign nationals into Western schools. It has not been with harmful intent that denominations have sponsored promising leaders through free education in the U.S. However, these benevolent plans to educate pastors then return them to their home country rarely see fruition. The education received in the foreign land, in a foreign language, from people who have foreign culture and practices does not translate well when the graduate returns. Moon reported this exact situation in the case of a talented young man named Philip, whose words are haunting, “The people in my church do not understand me anymore when I return home.”<sup>179</sup> Moon explained, “By neglecting the oral preferences of his own culture, he was afraid that his education was making him increasingly irrelevant there.”<sup>180</sup>

Corollaries of this can be seen in music and business. “The ascendance of a global pop culture has seriously undermined local folk culture. Folk culture is necessarily tied to a particular locality and is rooted in local skill and participation. Folk music, folk dance, and local arts and crafts require apprenticeship into a particular tradition and a willingness to labor under the auspices of a particular form. For this reason, folk culture can never be cosmopolitan.”<sup>181</sup> In the same way, theological education is hindered by this type of blanket globalization. The best answers for local issues are those thoughtfully and theologically drawn from awareness from the Scriptures, the culture and the values and mentalities of the local people.

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<sup>179</sup> W. Jay Moon, “Understanding Oral Learners,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 15, no. 1 (2012): 29-39, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-9647.2011.00757.x>.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>181</sup> Wilfred M McClay, *Why Place Matters: Geography, Identity, and Civic Life in Modern America* (New York: Encounter Books, 2014), 90.

Cindy Huggett emphasizes, “You must ‘localize the content’ for the nationality and culture of the students involved. Learners in various places may perceive content and training issues differently, so make sure your examples and graphics are ‘culturally neutral.’”<sup>182</sup> Examples and graphics should be culturally specific to the local context. Early Christians would adorn the walls and ceilings with images that would retell their Christian story. They would use culturally identifiable items to serve as symbols and use these symbols to create a “hook” or to bridge the gap to understanding.<sup>183</sup>

Communicators today need to speak through literature, audio, video, digital, drama, music, proverbs and orality. The use of these languages is beneficial as each person has their favorites. When their preferred communication style is presented to them, people open themselves to the message being delivered. Combinations of these learning languages should be created in conjunction with the learners themselves. This may create anxiousness on the part of teachers whose only prior experience has been teaching through previously created materials for which they are masters of the content. However, the receptivity shown by students should soon overcome those initial concerns. While some of these practices are already in use in some classrooms, it is important to pay attention to the ‘why’ behind the ‘what.’ “Adding visual material substantially increases the chances of retention. This is because the brain’s visual memory system has an enormous capacity for storage and remarkable availability for recall.”<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Cindy Huggett, *The Virtual Training Guidebook: How to Design, Deliver, and Implement Live Online Learning* (Alexandria, VA: ASTD Publications, 2014), 8.

<sup>183</sup> David Banks, “Image of Grace: Seeing and Sharing the Gospel Through Imagery,” (DMin. Dissertation, George Fox University, 2012), 36.

<sup>184</sup> David A. Sousa, *How the Brain Learns*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin: A Sage Company, 2011), 59-60.



Carey drives home these points: “...reminiscence is strong for imagery, for photographs, drawings, paintings - and poetry, with its word-pictures...(and) Our brain can impute meaning to almost anything. Groups decide what meaning to attach to a story, song or image...”<sup>185</sup> A hand over the heart, a dip of one’s head, an arm raised aloft. Every person considering these images assigns each a meaning. Is the raised arm a symbol of victory, query, volunteerism, praise or patriotism? The answer comes from within each person, their personal and cultural experiences.

Verbal and visual processing allow participants to become more involved in the learning process, and retention increases. This occurs because working memory has both verbal and visual components. Each selects, organizes, and processes its respective information before sending it to the frontal lobe for integration and interpretation. . . . In essence, the learner creates both a verbally based model and a visually based model of the new learning. These models are then integrated in the prefrontal cortex and connected to information already stored in the learner’s memory. Such sensory-rich integration helps the learner find sense and meaning in the new learning, significantly increasing the chances it will be remembered.<sup>186</sup>

When a new topic is presented, along with new imagery, it could be considered that the material is twice as likely to be remembered. However, the combination of the new verbal and new visual together has a compounding effect which more than doubles the likelihood that the content will be embedded into the memory. “When it comes to memory, researchers have known for more than one hundred years that pictures and text follow very different rules. Put simply, the more visual the input becomes, the more

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<sup>185</sup> Benedict Carey, *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where and Why It Happens* (New York: Random House, 2015), 27.

<sup>186</sup> David A. Sousa, *How the Brain Learns*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin: A Sage Company, 2011), 100.

likely it is to be recognized – and recalled. The phenomenon is so pervasive, it has been given its own name: the pictorial superiority effect, or PSE.<sup>187</sup>

Beyond the potential visual component of reading some materials, none of the process explained above requires literacy. It does however, describe a very useful process which is also beneficial for oral learners. The power of wrestling with content, in this case, verbally while considering intentionally crafted visual images. This is further strengthened when missionaries take steps to communicate in forms which are familiar to and readily accepted by oral learners as in the following report from Central Australia.

Regular teaching sessions started taking place, and little by little non-literate leaders accumulated a valuable store of Christian teaching that not only strengthened and enriched their own lives but which they were able to pass on to others. This sort of teaching has been given the title of ‘gum-leaf theology.’ But this was not achieved lightly. Much intensive preparation was made to ensure that the teaching material met the criteria for effective communication: relevant, clearly comprehensible, interesting, and making use of appropriate symbols.<sup>188</sup>

Certainly, Michael Polanyi did not have stylized symbols such as StudyMaps in mind when he explained the principle of manageability. However, his description is very beneficial to the process of understanding and creating new models for teaching oral learners.

...the principle of manageability consists in devising a representation of experience which reveals new aspects of it. This principle can be put into operation simply by writing down or otherwise uttering a designation of an experience, from which we can directly read off novel features of it. Alternatively, the manageability of symbols may include their capacity to be manipulated according to rules acknowledged as symbolic operations, or else merely to be handled informally, as when we turn the pages of a book to reconsider its subject. These services of manageability to thought can all be described as taking place in three stages:

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<sup>187</sup> John Medina, *Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home and School* (Seattle: Pear Press, 2014), 233.

<sup>188</sup> Harry Box, *Don't Throw the Book at Them: Communicating the Christian Message to People Who Don't Read* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2014), locations 2784-2788, Kindle.

1. Primary denotation.
2. Its reorganization.
3. The reading of the result.<sup>189</sup>

In developing new teaching models for oral learners, an application of these three stages would be as follows. First, study *with* oral learners in collaborative efforts to establish a wider knowledge base of their communication formats. Secondly, assist *them* in reorganizing what is learned into new forms designed for mass communication. Third, learn from the results, making adaptations and improvements from observing the discoveries found in analyzing the results.

W.Y.S.I.W.Y.G.<sup>190</sup> Revisited

“The best talent is a sharp ear and a good memory.”<sup>191</sup>

What follows is a practical application of Polanyi’s principles as experienced in active training opportunities in various Southeast Asian countries in 2016. To experiment with a new model for teaching oral learners, a StudyMap was introduced for an individual Bible story. The purposes for sharing this story were two-fold. First, to lead a discovery-based exploration on the teachings of baptism and to test the use of a single story StudyMap as a mnemonic tool.

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<sup>189</sup> Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post Critical Philosophy* (London, UK: Routledge, 2005), 85.

<sup>190</sup> Acronym for “What You See Is What You Get.”

<sup>191</sup> Albin Korem, Mawutodzi Kodzo Abissath, *Traditional Wisdom in African Proverbs: A Collection of 2000 Proverbs from 41 African Countries* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 2007), 93.

The lack of a decent artist subjected the groups to suffering under poor drawing skills, yet they were always gracious and attentive. The process for presenting and testing was as follows:

- Tell the story orally while drawing the StudyMap (below) on a whiteboard.
- Tell the story a second time while discussing various mental markers used based on ‘referential positioning’<sup>192</sup> of the verse numbers.
- Tell the story a third time while discussing visual mnemonics that were created based using clues presented by the shapes of the numbers.<sup>193</sup>

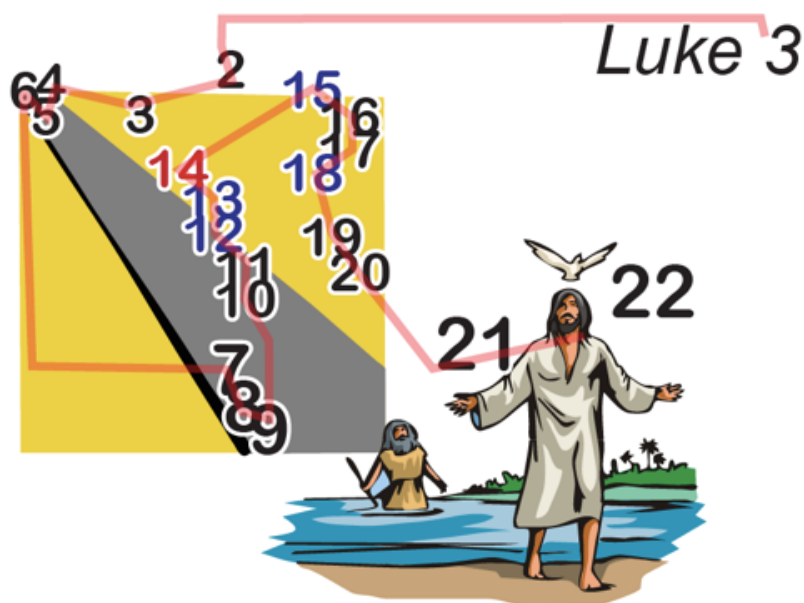


Figure 17:  
Baptism of Jesus StudyMap

<sup>192</sup> Stéphane Tibi, “Visual Learning with StudyMap Tools,” January 2009, accessed December 15, 2016, [http://studymaps.org/files/pdfs/v8n2-Tibi\\_VisualLearningWithStudyMaps\\_Didachel.pdf](http://studymaps.org/files/pdfs/v8n2-Tibi_VisualLearningWithStudyMaps_Didachel.pdf).

<sup>193</sup> Barbara A. Oakley, *A Mind for Numbers: How to Excel at Math and Science (Even if You Flunked Algebra)* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2014), 188.

After telling each verse grouping or ‘chunk,’<sup>194</sup> students would try to repeat that section from memory. For the third retelling, small images were drawn next to each verse while explaining what in the shape or position of the verse, or in the content of the verse which caused that thought. Some of the ideas are obvious, some are abstract. According to Foer<sup>195</sup>, the more abstract, the easier it is to remember. These would be stronger mnemonics if each person were to create their own.

It is worth noting that they were hearing this strange new concept through a translator, through poor drawing qualities, and without any prior teaching of utilizing visual cues for memory. In every country where this was presented this, there were always some who repeated not only the verses but every comment about how the images were used to recall the verse content. This speaks to the power of images in enhancing and assisting memory.

Here is a ‘cleaned-up’ copy of what was drawn on the whiteboard. As complicated as this looks, when practiced, the little images became very valuable as mnemonics such that participants could easily recite the twenty-one verses.

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>195</sup> Joshua Foer, *Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 37.



Figure 18:  
Baptism of Jesus StudyMap with Icons

To demonstrate the negative conditions the participants had to work under and the disadvantage which it surely caused, one of the line drawings from an actual training event is shown here.



Figure 19:  
Hand Drawn Baptism of Jesus StudyMap

In China, the participants created their own StudyMap. The kinetic process of creating their own StudyMap while studying the story internalized the story through both its words and the images they created. Several expressed that even though this was the first time they attempted this, they were greatly encouraged that they could remember the whole story so accurately in such a short time. While this was not conducted as a formal experiment, the anecdotal evidence was overwhelmingly in favor of the benefits of using images to help secure memory.

Beyond being a cleverly designed mnemonic tool, this StudyMap served well as a visual reference to be able to discuss the theology embedded within the story. The presence of embedded theology was discovered without ever announcing that purpose. Through open-ended questions, each group was led through a discovery process of examining the various statements made in the story. Comparing sections, or chunks, of the story began to unveil their eyes to the theological treasures woven into the narrative. The process led to joy as group after group realized the depth of learning they were

experiencing. A church leader in the Philippines was the first to express it verbally to his group when he said, “I don’t know if you all realize it, but we are *doing* theology here!”

The image below is a personalized StudyMap created by one of the students in China as a mnemonic device for Luke 11:1-13.

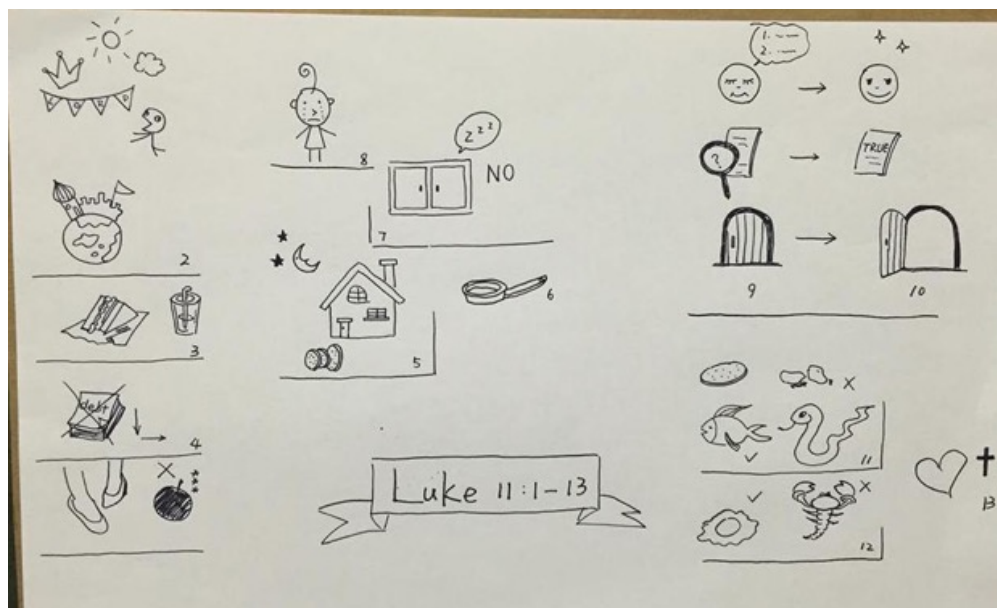


Figure 20:  
Student’s StudyMap of Luke 11:1-13

<sup>1</sup>One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

<sup>2</sup>He said to them, “When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.

<sup>3</sup>Give us each day our daily bread.

<sup>4</sup>Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.”

<sup>5</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread;

<sup>6</sup>a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’

<sup>7</sup>And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’

<sup>8</sup>I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.



<sup>9</sup> “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

<sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

<sup>11</sup> “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?

<sup>12</sup> Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?

<sup>13</sup> If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Luke 11:1-3 (NIV).

## SECTION 4:

### THE ARTIFACTS

Oral learners do not fit neatly into just one learning modality but are instead spread across a spectrum between Highly Literate to Highly Oral. They also interact with people from other learning preferences. There are not clear designations in any community visually identifying literate and non-literate communicators. Non-literates are adaptive by nature when among literates. To not be immediately classified as ‘less than,’ they have learned to mimic literates and cover their seeming deficiency in creative ways. A bi-vocational pastor was shocked when he discovered that the man he had worked next to in the construction industry for six years could not read. It was only after reflection that he realized that he never had to repeat himself around this coworker. This man demonstrated what may be called ‘survival listening.’ He listened well because he has no other option.

For these reasons, a multi-tiered approach to the development of artifacts is necessary to demonstrate the problem identified in this dissertation, that of appropriately taught, reproducible theological training for oral learners. This is not completely new in educational practice as adaptations to various audiences are a regular practice in teaching. It is common practice for Teacher’s Guides to offer a single lesson outline with suggestions for various audiences, whether children, teens, or adults. What is new for most will be the use of stories and narratives as primary content delivery rather than reading or lecture. Applications of this practice will be presented in three tiers corresponding to Abney’s Orality Scale. Abney’s U.S. based scale is used to depict the

range from ‘No Explanation’ to ‘As Much Explanation as Needed.’ These classifications apply for all oral learners.

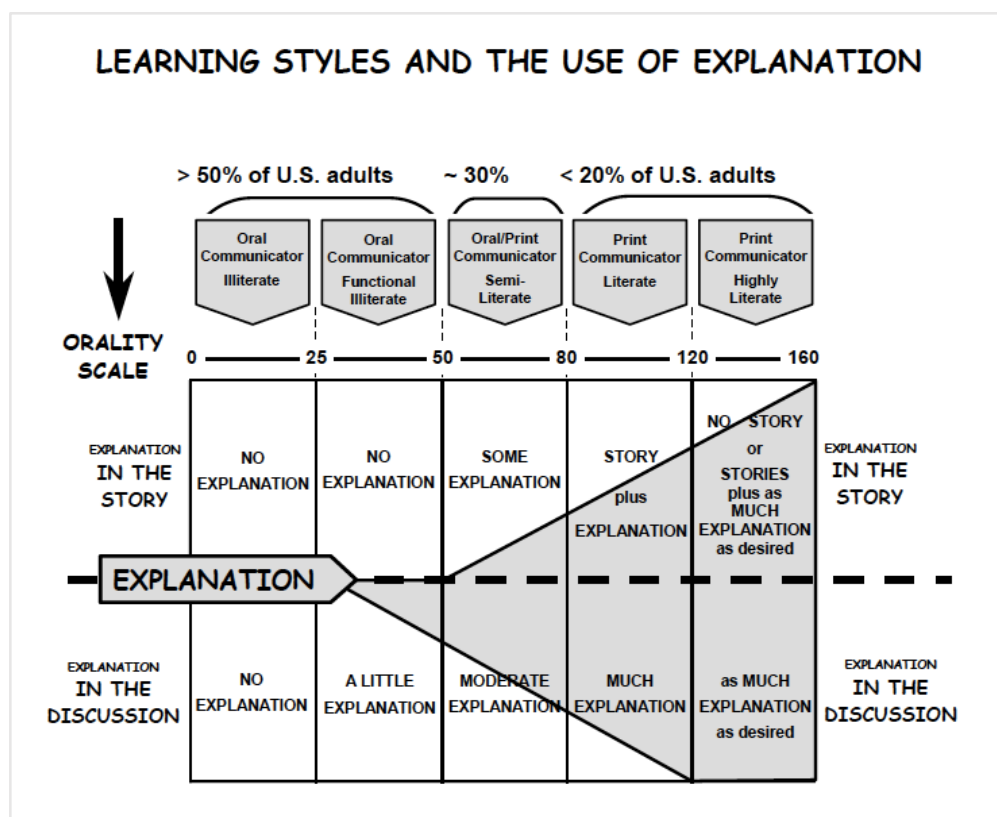


Figure 21<sup>197</sup>

A missionary in Southeast Asia revealed that in teaching fifty Oral Bible storytelling workshops over a nine-year period, she never failed to have the complete spectrum of learning styles present.<sup>198</sup> It did not matter if the participants were all urban or rural, wealthy or poor, educated or not educated, there was always a wide variety of learning preferences, even when in remote village areas. It is for this reason that the

<sup>197</sup> Lynne Abney, “Orality Assessment Tool Worksheet,” accessed October 8, 2016, [http://story4glory.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Orality\\_Assessment\\_Tool\\_Worksheet1.pdf](http://story4glory.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Orality_Assessment_Tool_Worksheet1.pdf)

<sup>198</sup> Name withheld for security purposes, interview on October 26, 2017, Bangkok, Thailand. This individual has trained through print, oral, visual and kinesthetic learning models. concurrently because of the wide variety of preferences regardless of geographic, social or financial status.

artifacts being developed reflect three tiers of delivery method. Each learner then has the opportunity to gravitate towards and embrace the artifact which will be most understood and therefore more easily reproduced in their own efforts.

Visual aids along with truth bearing stories then, become very beneficial in explaining important issues, such as doctrine or medical information. These tools help to fill in the many potential gaps in language and meaning which easily occur in multiple language translations. The visual images offer a permanence not found in spoken or written words due to the entangled issues inherent in multiple layers of translation.

Reception, retention and reproducibility become the supporting columns for story based visual teaching. The images take their meanings from the stories, which are told in appropriate forms. Oral learners are not only taught in ways they can understand and embrace; they also become empowered to become tellers and teachers themselves.

These artifacts will demonstrate concrete examples which foster the type of educational shift which is needed to reach, engage and promote oral learners into oral leaders.

### Tier One – Highly Oral User

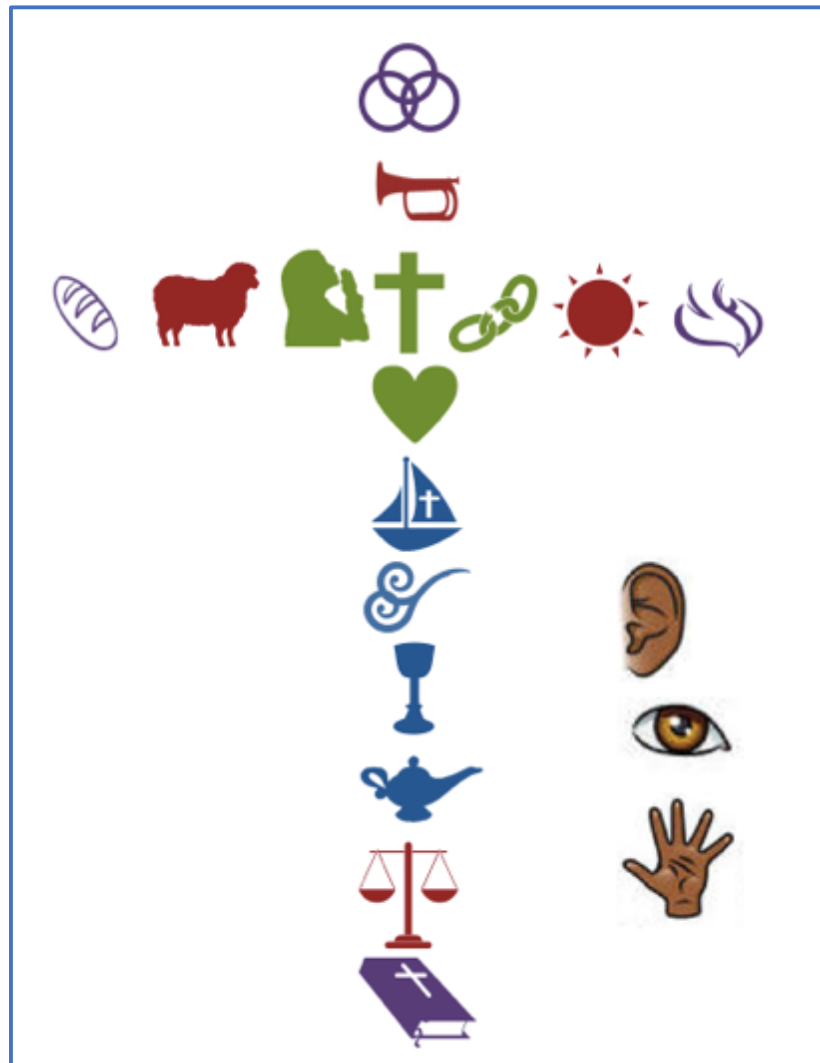


Figure 22:  
Essentials Icons Final Order

The design of this Artifact has been developed with highly oral people in mind. These images serve as a foundation piece for recalling and teaching the basic beliefs of a particular denomination. Each image reflects an individual belief or ‘Article of Faith.’ Each is supported by selected Bible stories which can be presented live or delivered via pre-recorded audio. Oral-friendly stories were selected as alternatives to the biblical

support for each of the articles as found in the denominational manual.<sup>199</sup> Oral learners do not readily think in ‘list’ fashion. Lists of seemingly random verses do not connect well nor are memorable for the oral learner because there does not appear to be any frame of reference. In short, there’s no story linking the various parts. A complete biblical narrative which has the desired theological elements present within it is a much better reference tool. The story becomes the ‘basket’ which contains all of the truths. The process of asking discovery-based questions draws out the truths from within the stories. While there are different ways to format such questions, the ones chosen for this project follow this list of theologically selected Bible stories. Instructions for literate leaders are included here. These stories would be translated into the appropriate heart language, then, along with the instructions for how to process the stories week by week, would be recorded into audio format. These recordings are then distributed via solar-powered audio players, SD cards inserted into phones or via Bluetooth<sup>200</sup> or WhatsApp.<sup>201</sup> Those choices are always locally determined.

#### ARTICLES OF FAITH - 44 Stories

These Articles of Faith stories have been carefully chosen to reflect the doctrine and beliefs of one particular denomination<sup>202</sup> although they are also very similar to other denominations. These stories should be used along with the Study Map designed for the

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<sup>199</sup> Dean G. Blevins et al., eds., *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene: History, Constitution, Government Ritual* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Pub. House, 2013), 28-40.

<sup>200</sup> Bluetooth, a wireless sharing mechanism.

<sup>201</sup> WhatsApp is an encrypted social networking App.

<sup>202</sup> Church of the Nazarene, “Making Christlike Disciples in the Nations,” accessed April 26, 2017, <http://nazarene.org/>.

Articles of Faith. Using the Study Map will help greatly in remembering this number of stories as well as in remembering the purposes being used for each story.

Each letter that is listed after naming the Article should be shared in a single session. For example: Article 1) TRIUNE GOD, has a) Gen 1 b) John 14:1-26 c) Mk 1:9-11. This means that each of these is a separate story and could be shared over three different meetings. Those Articles that have no smaller letters separating the stories, should be done together as one lesson.

Example: 7 PREVENIENT GRACE Romans 5:6 & Mark 2:1-12

- |                   |                                     |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 TRIUNE GOD      | a) Genesis 1                        |
|                   | b) John 14:1-26                     |
|                   | c) Acts 17:22-31                    |
| 2 JESUS CHRIST    | a) John 1:1-14                      |
|                   | b) Philippians 2:5-11               |
|                   | c) Matt. 28:1-10                    |
|                   | d) John 3:1-21                      |
| 3 HOLY SPIRIT     | a) John 14:1-26                     |
|                   | b) John 16:5-15                     |
|                   | c) Romans 8:1-27                    |
|                   | d) Acts 2:1-8                       |
| 4 HOLY SCRIPTURES | a) Luke 24:37-47                    |
|                   | b) 2 Timothy 3:14-16 & Heb. 4:12-13 |
| 5 ORIGINAL SIN    | a) Genesis 3:1-24                   |
|                   | b) 1 John 1:5-8                     |

- 5 PERSONAL SIN      a) Genesis 4:1-16  
                              b) Psalm 51:1-17  
                              REVIEW WEEK \*    Same directions as before
- 6 ATONEMENT      Luke 23:32-47
- 7 PREVENIENT GRACE Romans 5:6 & Mark 2:1-12
- 8 REPENTANCE      a) Romans 2:4 & Luke 19:1-10  
                              b) Luke 13:1-5  
                              c) 2 Kings 5:1-19
- 9 JUSTIFICATION      Luke 18:9-14
- 9 REGENERATION      Ephesians 2:8-10 & Acts 8:26-40
- 9 ADOPTION      Galatians 4:1-7
- 10 ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION a) 1 Thess. 5:22-24 & Rom 12:1-2  
                                      b) Ezekiel 36:25-27  
                                      c) Mark 12:28-34
- 11 THE CHURCH      a) 1 Corinthians 12:12-31  
                              b) Acts 6:1-7  
                              c) 1 Peter 2:4-5 & Acts 2:41-47  
                              REVIEW WEEK \*    Same directions as before
- 12 BAPTISM      a) Luke 3:2-22  
                              b) Acts 8:26-40
- 13 LORD'S SUPPER    a) Luke 22:14-20  
                              b) 1 Corinthians 11:23-32
- 14 DIVINE HEALING    a) Matthew 9:18-38 & James 5:13-16



b) Acts 3:1-10

15 2nd COMING OF CHRIST a) 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

b) Revelation 22:7-20

16 RESURRECTION a) John 5:24-29

b) John 11:17-27

16 JUDGMENT a) Matthew 25:31-46

b) Revelation 20:11-15

16 DESTINY a) Daniel 12:1-3

b) Luke 16:19-31

REVIEW WEEK - Take time to review this section of stories together. Talk about the connections between the stories. Talk about the changes that may have occurred in the lives of those listening to and discussing these stories.

Next, take time to review all of the stories together. Discuss how these stories may have changed lives or even the community. Then discuss how those who have learned these stories can spread these stories beyond the current group.

### Discussion Questions

The images of the 'Ear, Eye and Hand' are visual reminders to be used in two ways.

- 1) As guides for discussion after the telling of the Bible story. The images remind the oral learning leader to facilitate the following questions:
  - a) What are THEY hearing?
  - b) What are THEY seeing?

- c) What are THEY doing?
- 2) The same images then are used to guide personal applications by moving the focus of the discussion from ‘THEM,’ the people in the story, to ‘US,’ the people discussing the story. The same images then are repurposed to:
- a) What are WE hearing?
  - b) What are WE seeing?
  - c) What will WE do?

Leaders will be taught to expand upon the answers which will be given to these basic questions. The primary purpose and emphasis is to create a model which is easy to learn, use and reproduce in other leaders, while requiring no literacy.

In the first edition of this Artifact, all that is needed is this single page, perhaps laminated on cardstock and the selected Bible stories, recorded in the local language.



Figure 23:  
Essentials Icons on Dice

A second edition of this Artifact is being developed for the same purpose, but with a different public application. For those in areas where Christianity is not as openly welcome or for those who wish to always have a physical reminder with them, these same images will be printed on bracelets. One style of bracelet is being developed from



Essential beliefs icons are shown here on a bracelet and a necklace. They also may be awarded individually as people are able to accurately tell the stories connected to the iconic images. This type of activity will embed the image and stories together into strong mnemonics. A second version of this tool is also being presented before focus groups across Africa. They are considering the addition of complementary design images to go along with the support stories for each major article. These images would be printed in a single color on the three remaining sides of each die. When completed, the wearer will have a VToC of forty-two stories on their wrist.

## TIER TWO – HIGH ORAL RELIANCE, LIMITED LITERACY



Figure 25:  
Jesus Film Headscarf

This headscarf has been designed to be an initial follow-up tool for discipleship of new believers who have responded to the Jesus Film. The images shown, created by a West African artist, are all from stories which would have been seen in the Jesus Film. Most women in West Africa wear headscarves, so the discipleship tool would be available nearly at all times. Whether used individually or in small groups, each story can

be retold and discussed or a metanarrative of all the stories may be shared. The individual stories were selected to address a series of basic discipleship functions.

Story	Reference	Function
1 BAPTISM OF JESUS	3:2- 22	Baptism
2 DEVIL TEMPTS JESUS	4:1-13	Temptation
3 JESUS FORGIVES A WOMAN	7:36-50	Forgiveness
4 SOWER AND SEED	8:4-15	Fruitfulness
5 JESUS CALMS A STORM	8:22-26	Authority over Nature
6 JESUS HEALS A DEMONIAK	8:27-39	Authority over Demons
7 THE LORD’S PRAYER	11:1-13	Love Your Neighbor
8 GOOD SAMARITAN	10:25-37	Pray to God
9 BLIND BEGGAR	18:35-43	Healing
10 ZACCHAEUS	19:1-10	Discipleship
11 JESUS CRUCIFIED	23:33-47	Crucifixion, Submission
12 JESUS APPEARS	24:36-48	Resurrection, Victory Over Death

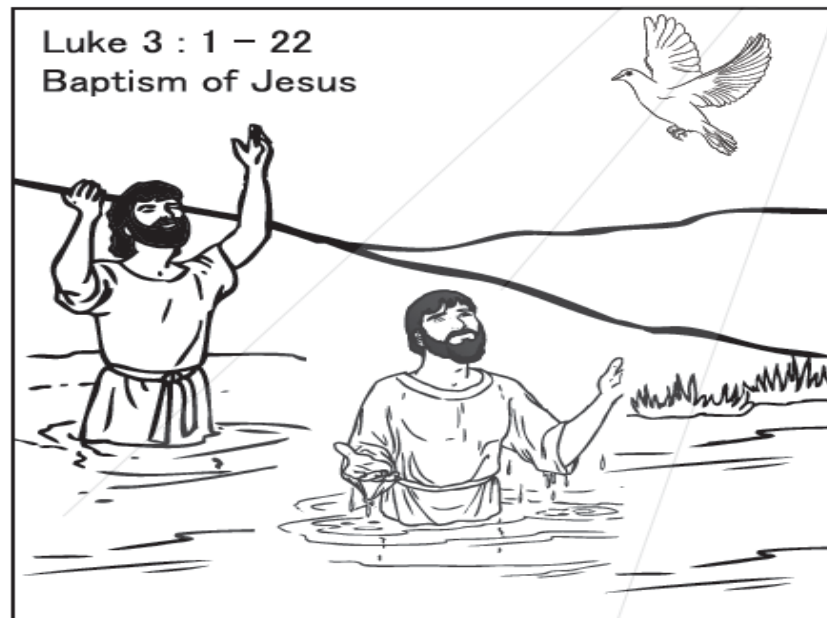


Figure 26:  
Baptism of Jesus

Each image has a description of that story as well as the Scripture reference where it may be found. This is so that any encounters with literates, semi-literates or those wishing more information would find additional information available on the scarf. A second purpose of this Artifact is evangelistic with an emphasis on being reproducible. The plan, according to the Jesus Film leaders, is that those who desire to have a scarf of their own may 'earn' one by memorizing all twelve stories and agreeing to lead a discussion group of other interested people. It is their intention that this strategy will develop many home-based churches.

It is also felt that once the groups become accustomed to teaching and learning through this model, it will be relatively easy to promote the use of other such visually driven story sets.



Figure 27:  
Jesus Film Headscarf on Woman



### TIER THREE – BIBLE STORY APP, LOW ORALITY RELIANCE, SEMI-LITERATE

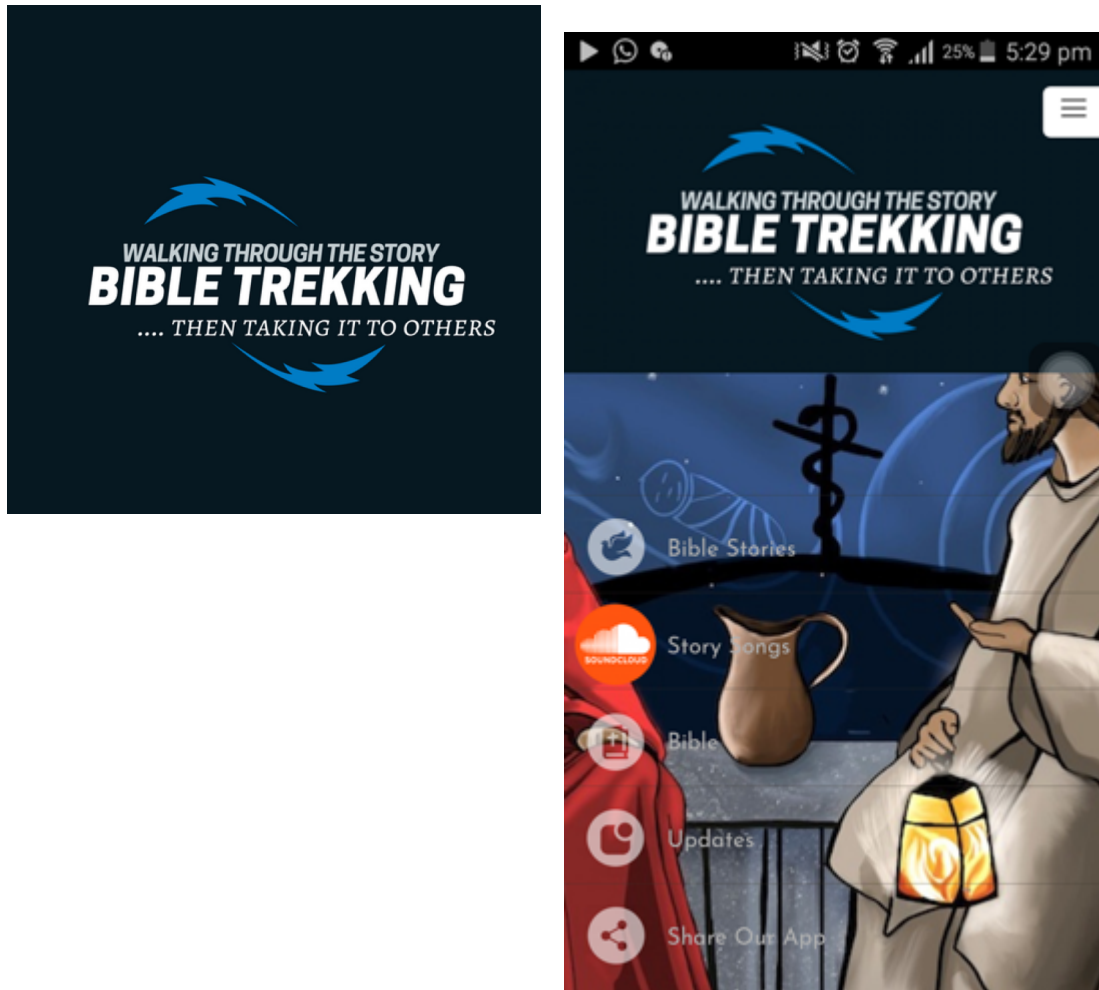


Figure # 28  
Bible Trekking Cover Page

As technology increases its inevitable journey into more of the previously unreached areas of the world, more and more oral learners are not only learning a bit of written literacy but are growing in their familiarity with technical literacy. The Bible Trekking™<sup>203</sup> App was designed with them in mind. It is rather simple compared to the more sophisticated Apps being developed today but serves the purposes for which it is

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<sup>203</sup> Ray Neu, "Bible Trekking," Leader's Audio Bible, 2012, accessed April 29, 2017, [http://leadersaudiobible.com/?page\\_id=361](http://leadersaudiobible.com/?page_id=361) (The App is based upon the work hosted on this website, owned by the author.)



intended. The following series of screen shots reveal the simplicity of navigation. A similar path exists for each of the twelve stories. These stories were selected to give new believers a beginning foundational understanding of the faith.

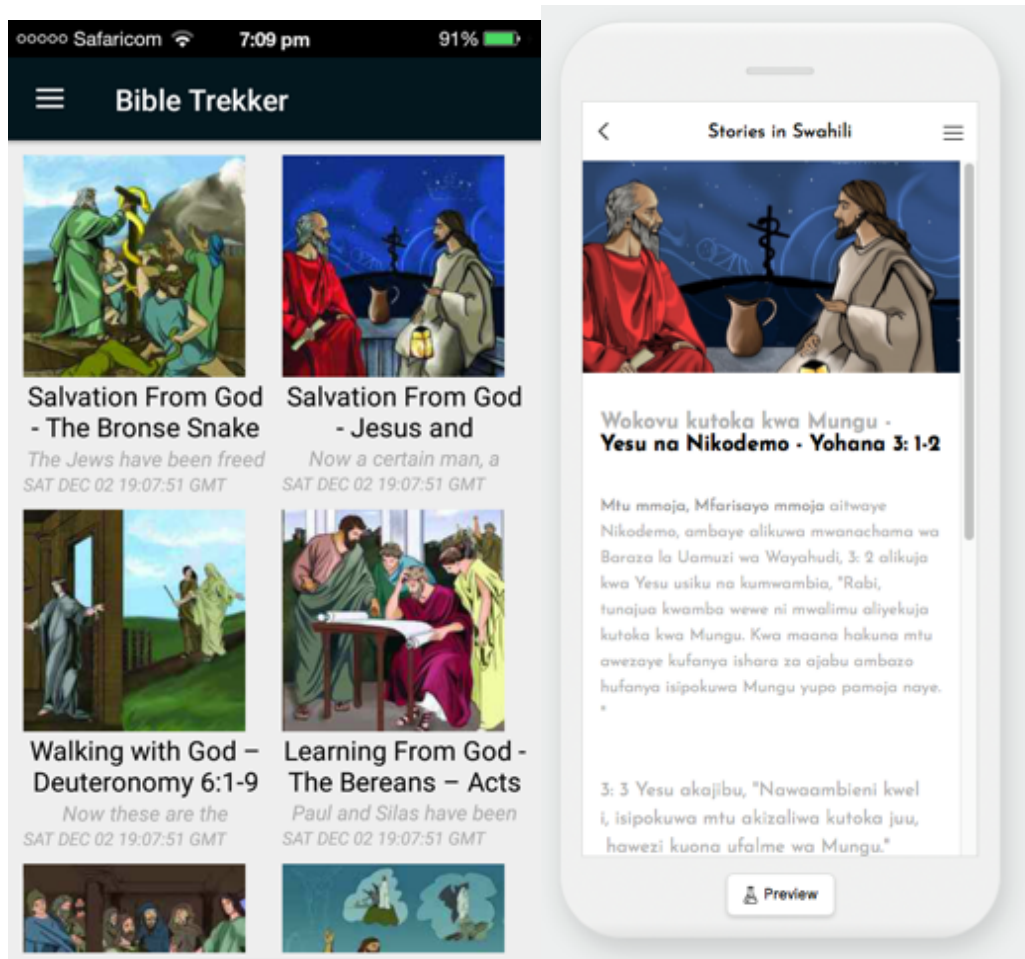


Figure 28:  
Bible Trekking Screen Shots 1

From the Visual Table of Contents (VToC), individual stories may be selected. The next screen reveals a custom designed piece of art created to tell the sacred story and some of the embedded lessons. While viewing the picture, the user has the options to listen to the audio of the story and if desired, they can follow the written text.

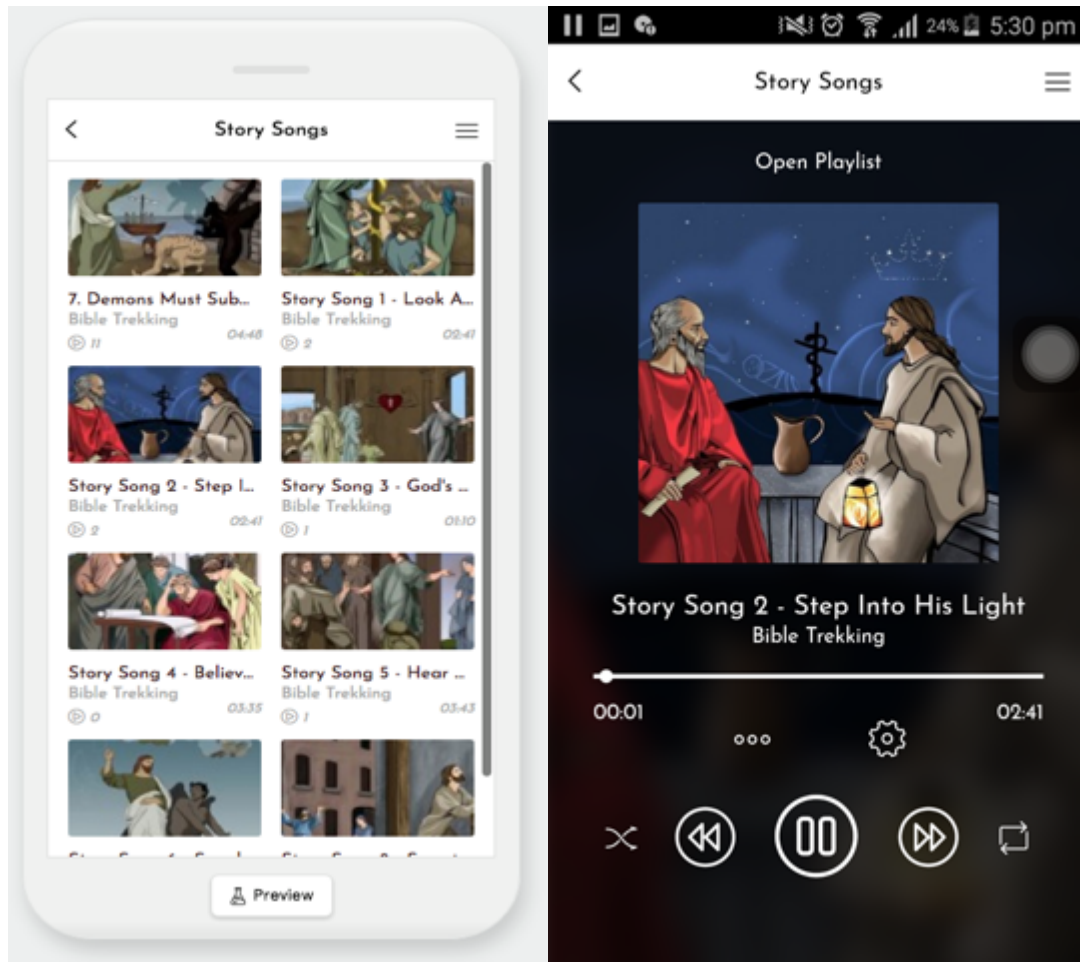


Figure 29:  
Bible Trekking Screen Shots 2

The same navigation is used for the songs, which were custom written to go along with each sacred story. Each song follows a pattern of 1) telling the story, 2) observing some lessons from the story and 3) challenging personal application to the listener. Once again, users have the choice of listening and those interested may follow along with the written lyrics.

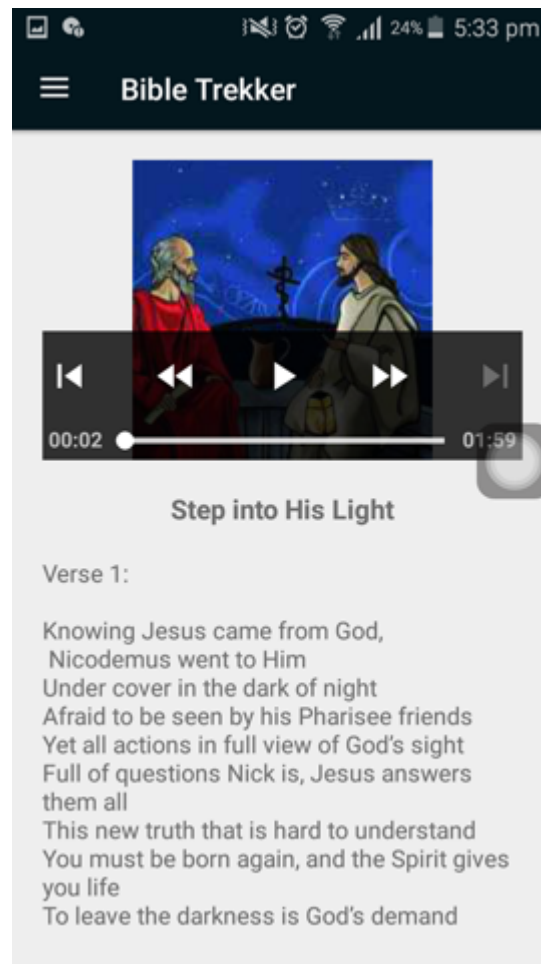


Figure 30:  
Bible Trekking Screen Shot 3

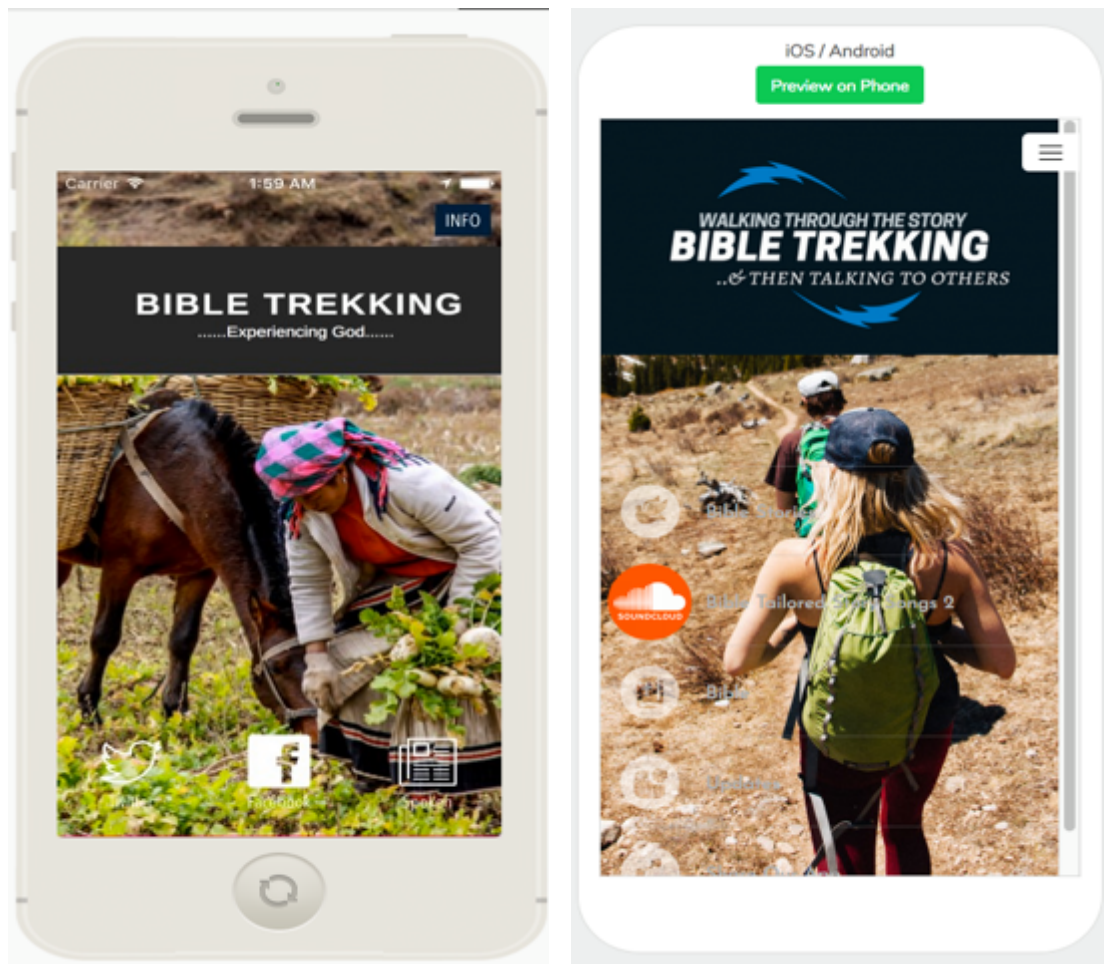


Figure 31:  
Bible Trekking Screen Shots 4

These screenshots underscore the intentional engaging of multiple cross-cultural audiences through offering different skins which would have their own design pattern followed throughout. Current languages in development include Kannada, Telegu, Swahili and English.



Figure 32:  
Bible Trekking Screen Shot 5

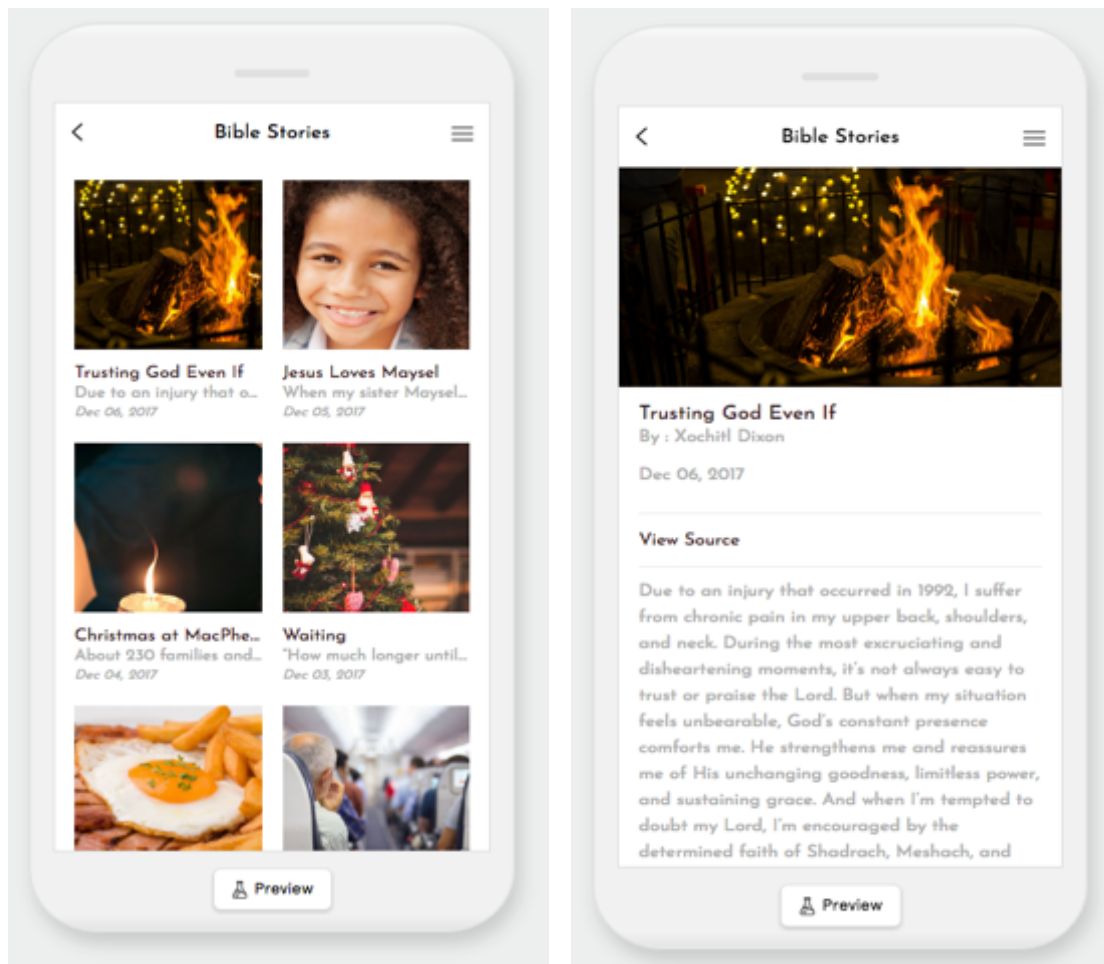


Figure 33:  
Bible Trekking Screen Shots 6

A final element included in the App are personal stories of others. These will demonstrate to new believers that they are not alone while encouraging mutual sharing of life experiences. The design of the overall App is intended to be simple to use whether by oral preference or literate learners. It is hoped that this will serve as a gap step in between these two valuable worlds.



### Artifact Specification Sheet

Due to the reality that oral learners are scattered across a spectrum between highly literate to highly oral, the three Artifacts represent different points along the spectrum. In order to minimize the length of this report, general statements will be made here about the process and include detailed specifications in the Appendix. Testing is active and success will be evaluated by denominational leaders.

	TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
<b>GOALS</b>	Aid in Teaching Discipleship and Theology	Aid in Teaching Discipleship Church Planting	Aid in Teaching Discipleship and Theology
<b>AUDIENCE</b>	Non-literate Primary Oral Learners	Low literate Primary Oral Learners	Literate / Secondary Oral Learners
<b>SCOPE</b>	Ongoing	Ongoing	Twelve Weeks
<b>CONTENT</b>	1. 'Infographic' style teaching card 2. Cube Bracelets	Head Covering / Handkerchief with Bible Stories Images	App for Smart Phones
<b>BUDGET</b>	Minimal to develop. Production Costs borne by End User	Minimal to develop. Production Costs borne by End User	\$100. USD
<b>POST GRADUATE CONSIDERATIONS</b>	More than the product, the method is being promoted, thus it could spin off into many products by ministries and educational institutions.	The method is being utilized already. The product is easily adaptable into different story sets, which could develop additional products by partnering organizations.	Could easily lend itself into multiple versions and ancillary productions if market bears interest.

Table 3:  
3 Tiers Artifact

**Artifact / Tier 1 – Designed for Non-Literate Primary Oral learners**

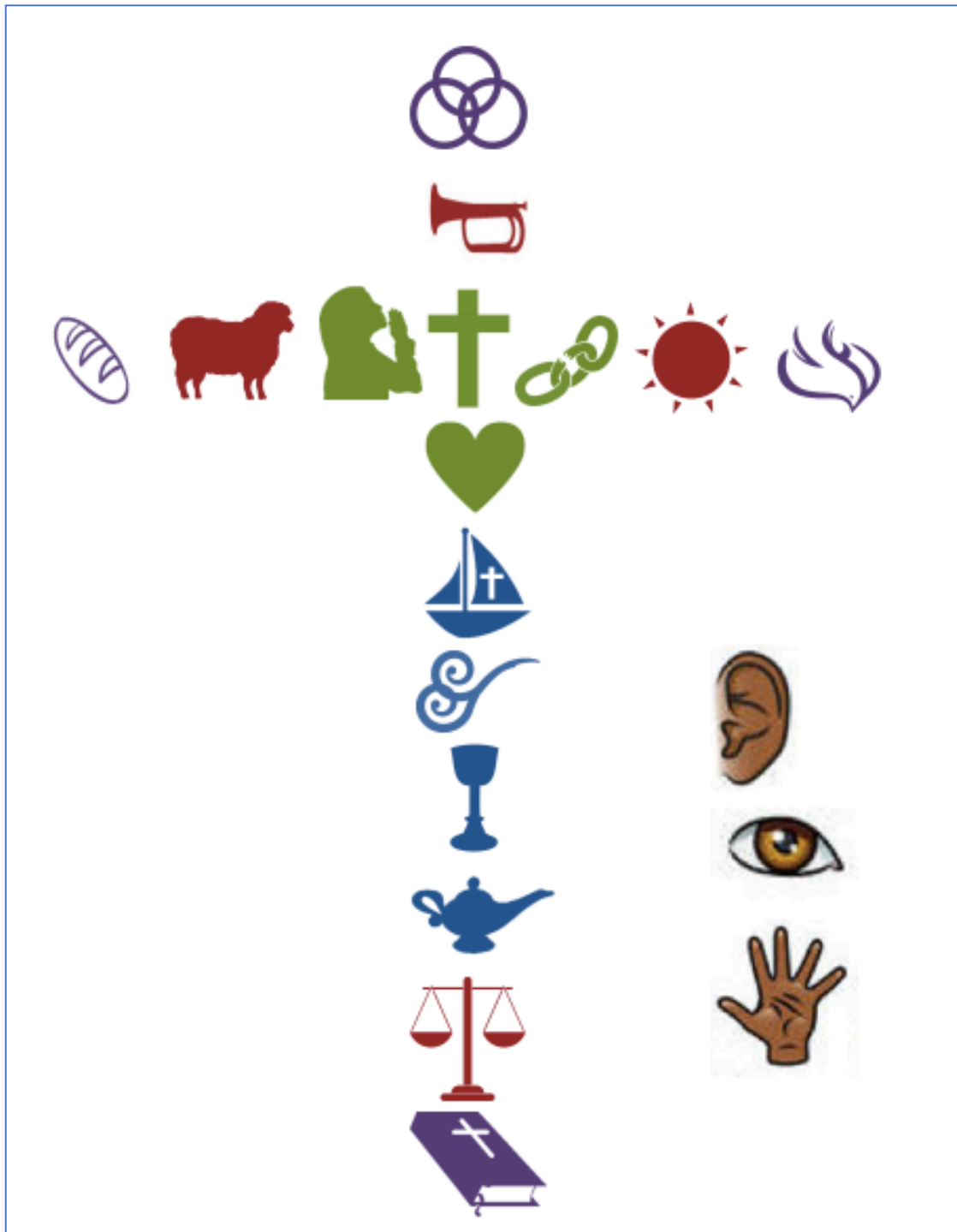


Figure 34:  
Tier 1 Artifact



## Artifact / Tier 2 – Designed for Low Literate Primary Oral learners



Figure 35:  
Tier 2 Artifact in French<sup>204</sup>

<sup>204</sup> Note: Many of the countries in West Africa where this artifact will be used are the French-speaking Francophone countries.

Artifact / Tier 3 – Bible Story App, Low Orality Reliance, Semi-Literate



Figure 36:  
Tier 3 Artifact

## POSTSCRIPT

“Symbol speaks but silently, It requires a voice. Story becomes the voice for non-vocal symbol by articulating its meaning; story answers symbol’s need to move beyond wordless speech into spoken speech.”<sup>205</sup>

In this paper, we have identified the problem non-literate pastors face, recognized the efforts literates have made so far and the problems inherent with each of the potential solutions and offered a creative alternative based on research which is supported by field testing and experience. Images are powerful. Images backed by relevant stories are dynamic.

In pursuing a suitable solution, the choice was made to construct the approach of Narrative Based Visual Theology, not because it is easier but because it is better for oral learners. It would be easier to adapt some of the potential solutions being used by others as much content already exists. However, this does not serve the needs and learning styles of my primary audience. The numerous examples offered of how oral learners think and process support this thesis. The Artifacts are further evidence of the thoroughness employed in examining this topic while paying attention to the results being experienced in the mission field.

The work compiled here is a solid foundation. There remains more to be done in constructing culturally specific, worldview aware, visual-oral devices which will first demonstrate, then prove to educators that new methodologies are not only needed, they are attainable and within our reach.

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<sup>205</sup> Tom Steffen, *Worldview-based Storying: The Integration of Symbol, Story, and Ritual in the Orality Movement* (Richmond, VA: The Rainmaker, 2018), 156.

May this work encourage others to explore deeper into understanding differences in Asian and African mindsets, perceptions and natural learning styles. More effort will be given to understanding and exploring how worldview affects the approaches educators will need to take to continue making improvements in this field of study. Experimental missionaries will likely continue to pave the way as they live, work, share, sing, teach, tell, draw, dance and show themselves to be learners as well as storytellers.

A church leader shared how the orality training they received was solving a dilemma. Previously, they had been aggressively planting new churches but had stopped when they depleted their supply of literate pastors. After observing the rapid learning curve experienced through the Narrative Visual Oral methodology, the same District leader told me that they were renewing their church planting efforts as they now knew how to lead and train pastors who did not read. He recently shared that fifty churches had adopted Bible storytelling as their primary format, even for Sunday morning services.

Perhaps a revolution has begun.

APPENDIX:  
EXPANDED DETAILS SPECIFICATION SHEET

Due to the reality that oral learners are scattered across a spectrum between highly literate to highly oral, I have elected to present three Artifacts which represent different points along the spectrum. For this Expanded Details Sheet, I will offer responses for each Artifact separately. In keeping with a more ‘oral learner’ friendly modality, each artifact will be designated by a small version of its overall image.

**Artifact 1 – Designed for Non-Literate Primary Oral learners**

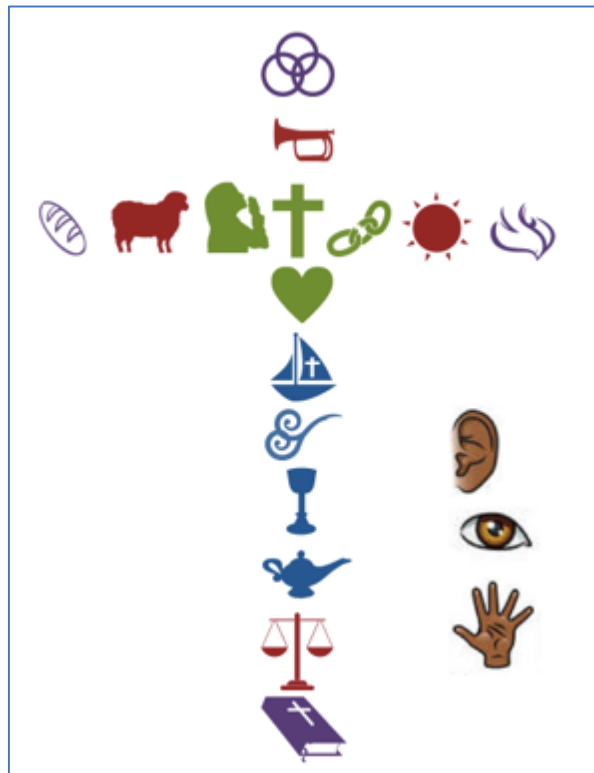


Figure 37:  
Essentials Icons Final Order

## Goals and Strategies

- What are the main goals for the Track 02 Artifact?

The main goals for this Artifact are to be the guiding resource:

1. To serve as a Visual Table of Contents and mnemonic device for the basic doctrines of the Church of the Nazarene.
  2. To be a teaching and discussion guide for processing Bible stories connected to each icon. The 'Ear,' 'Eye,' and 'Hand' are mnemonic tools to guide the discussions in small groups.
- How will you test a "beta-version" of the Artifact and assess its success?
    1. Leadership in the Church of the Nazarene Africa West Field will implement the distribution of this Artifact throughout the thirteen countries where they maintain organized presence.
    2. Initial organizational meeting was held in September in Cote d'Ivoire where this plan was introduced and accepted.
    3. They have already appointed a person to be the Oral Discipleship Coordinator for the field.
    4. Trainings for Orality have already begun, the first being held in Dakar, Senegal in November. Others will follow beginning in January 2018 and following.
  - How will you measure the success of your Artifact?
 

Success will be measured by the Church of the Nazarene leadership as they receive reports from each District on numbers of trainings and numbers of small groups utilizing this methodology.

- How will you adequately maintain the finished product over the long-haul (of its life)?

Management of the Artifact will be the responsibility of the denomination, specifically the Oral Discipleship Coordinator, under the oversight of the Field Strategy Coordinator. The newly appointed Regional Director envisioned the overall orality efforts and will offer his leadership as well.

#### Audience

- Who is the primary intended audience/user of your completed Artifact?

The primary audience are those church members who are non-literates or primary oral learners by design or choice.

- What do you want the audience/user to do/think/experience after encountering your Artifact?

The oral learners who engage with this Artifact will find a new level of empowerment once they experience their new positions as not just participants but leaders. It is anticipated that this new level of leadership will have a viral impact on the growth of new groups.

- What task will your audience/user be trying to accomplish wherein your Artifact might be utilized?

Discipleship of new believers in a model easily reproducible by non-literate oral learners and additional church planting are the intended outcomes according to denominational leadership.

## Artifact Scope and Content

- Define the scope of your Artifact. What will be the technical and content parameters for your Artifact?

The scope of this artifact may take two forms:

1. A simple one page card bearing the icons as shown in the overall image.
2. A bracelet, conceived of as a series of dice, printed in the four designated colors, which help tell the storyline of the icons and their related beliefs.

These then are threaded into a single bracelet.

- How will the content of your Artifact be organized?
  1. Printed in color on cardstock and laminated.
  2. The individual icons could be in jumbled order while on the bracelet. The bracelet could be disassembled and placed onto a table to illustrate the overall connections.
- What special technical or functional requirements are needed?

The only requirements are the Storyteller Trainer who first tells the stories while presenting the icons and keen listening ears and minds to retain the oral stories.

## Budget

- What is the entire budget (line-item) for the Artifact?

Artwork was designed free of charge by a local artist. Beyond time, no monetary expenses have been sustained. Certainly, for others to duplicate this type of work, would involve a potential considerable amount of money. Time and cost considerations would need to be given for design and development of the imagery.



- What hardware and software may be required to complete the Artifact?

Printing of Images will be done locally by each District and paid from their budgets.

Production of bracelets is being examined to see whether they may be made in China or West Africa.

If the source of the stories was elected to be in audio form, this would create an additional cost. One large program in Nigeria reported that seventy percent of those trained to do oral storytelling, did so without use of audio devices. Other less expensive alternatives which are available in some areas are the use of SD cards inside capable phones.

Bluetooth sharing and Social media options such as WhatsApp also reduce the need for and cost of physical mechanisms.

- Outsourcing fees?

Artwork was developed by a volunteer church member in Senegal.

- Ongoing personnel/administrative support costs?

The Oral Discipleship Coordinator is a paid position being underwritten by a department within the denomination.

## Promotion

- How will you market or make available your Artifact to your intended audience/users?

The denominational structure offered by the Church of the Nazarene will be used to promote the awareness and availability of the Artifact.

- What is your overall marketing strategy?

Same response. However, the efforts will be monitored in order to share their results with other world areas of the denomination and to extend such production ideas to other ministries.

### Standards of Publication

- What are the “standards of publication” particular to the chosen media genre?

That the icons were developed with cooperation and input from local West African leadership and artists.

That the overall look and ‘feel’ should reflect locally contextualized images.

These were approved as such.

- What is the rationale for your choices?

Approval of the local West African Church of the Nazarene denominational leaders.


### Action Plan

The “action plan” outlines how you will complete the Track 02 Artifact in a timely manner. The “action plan” considers three areas in preparation for completing the Artifact:

1. Identifying the various components of the Track 02 Artifact.
  - Graphic artwork needed for icons.
  - Storyline to bring together the overall image.
2. Identifying the technical skills required to complete the Artifact. This includes:
  - a. Identifying the specific skills necessary to develop the Artifact within the chosen medium.

- Specific skills needed to develop this Artifact include low level proficiency with Word or a graphic design software program.
  - Semiotic and theological understanding to be able to assess each icon for its intended meaning.
- b. Offering an assessment of the advisee's present skill-set.
- The advisee's skills are well within these parameters for graphic layout
  - And for semiotic review and theological, as a student under Dr. Leonard Sweet and an ordained elder in the Church of the Nazarene.
3. Developing a timeline. This includes:
- a. Outlining when and how the advisee will acquire the necessary skills (when applicable) to correct present deficiencies.
  - b. Setting deadlines for when the various components of the Track 02 Artifact will be completed.



- The  consists of the selection of icons to represent articles of faith of the Church of the Nazarene. The originals were completed by the General Editor in 2015.
- Examination and refinement of the icons. My semiotic review and subsequent refinement was completed in September, 2017.

- Initial presentation to denominational leadership. This occurred during denominational leadership meetings in Cote d'Ivoire during October 12-14, 2017.
- Any additional refinements. Additional refinements were suggested and largely completed by October. 14, 2017.
- Distribution through denominational channels. Distribution to key leaders across Africa began in November 2017, under the direction of the Regional Director. Plans are being developed in various departments to utilize beginning in early 2018.

## Artifact 2 – Designed for Low Literate Primary Oral learners



Figure 38:  
Jesus Film Headscarf – Portuguese

### Goals and Strategies

- What are the main goals for the Track 02 Artifact?

2. To serve as a Visual Table of Contents and mnemonic device for Nazarene Jesus Film Teams to use as a primary “follow-up” discipleship tool after showings of the Jesus Film.
  3. To serve as an incentive and guarantor of consistent discipleship process across the thirteen countries in West Africa actively using the Jesus Film for Church of the Nazarene evangelism, discipleship and church planting efforts.
- How will you test a “beta-version” of the Artifact and assess its success?
    1. Initial “beta” testing has been completed via presentation to various leadership groups across West Africa. This occurred during meetings held in the Fall of 2017.
    2. During February 2018, print runs of three thousand are being created in various colors in order to test their receptivity at training events beginning in February - March 2018.
  - How will you measure the success of your Artifact?
 

Success will be measured by the receptivity and comments of those invited to the Training events and determined by evaluation of denominational leadership as these headscarves are introduced and distributed into the Africa West Field.
  - How will you adequately maintain the finished product over the long-haul (of its life)?
 

Maintaining the use of this product falls into the hands of denominational leadership as connected to their short and long-term goals for this Field. They

have hired a full time staff position and committed resources to ensure its success and continued use.

## Audience

- Who is the primary intended audience/user of your completed Artifact?

The primary audience for this Artifact are new believers who have recently viewed the Jesus Film and those discipling them through primary oral methods.

- What do you want the audience/user to do/think/experience after encountering your Artifact?

The intent is that those using the device will have a helpful resource guide to selected stories from within the Jesus Film. These will be used in guiding conversations about faith with new believers and those who have expressed interest in learning more about Christianity after viewing the Jesus Film. These visual depictions will be mental reminders of the stories they encountered during the viewing of the Jesus Film. This should engage both their minds and hearts.

- What task will your audience/user be trying to accomplish wherein your Artifact might be utilized?

The desired outcome from the denominational leaders is for the Jesus Film Teams to have a discipleship tool which will be readily accepted by new believers, that the new believers will quickly come to know the basics of a life of faith and that this tool will be easily reproduced as a discipleship training model for those with little to no literacy.

## Artifact Scope and Content

- Define the scope of your Artifact. What will be the technical and content parameters for your Artifact?

The size of this headscarf was chosen based upon the normal headwear of women in West Africa, which will be about sixty centimeters square.

- How will the content of your Artifact be organized?

Content was organized to follow a pattern developed in a StudyMap created by Rev. Stéphane Tibi and Rev. Ray Neu, the author of this dissertation.

- What special technical or functional requirements are needed?

To present a more culturally acceptable Artifact, a local artist is needed to create images consistent with West African expectations.

## Budget

- What is the entire budget (line-item) for the Artifact?

No specific budget was established but the project has received denominational leadership approval, so it will continue to progress forward. An artist was secured who volunteered his time and talent so there was no additional budgetary impact. Printing costs for the headscarves will be absorbed through donations from a foundation committed to assisting with this project. The scarves will be ‘earned’ by memorizing the twelve stories and committing to starting a discussion group of their own.

- What hardware and software may be required to complete the Artifact?

The artist had his own equipment, negating any additional costs.

- Outsourcing fees?



Printing of the headscarves will be ongoing with both Field and denominational support. A plan is being developed to supplement the foundation's donations by appealing to U.S. churches to purchase scarves for various countries. Printing costs are being quoted in Togo at \$1.60 per piece and in China at \$0.65 per piece. Shipping and duty charges will need to be taken into account as well.

- Ongoing personnel/administrative support costs?

A full time Oral Discipleship Coordinator was hired and appointed to include this within the responsibilities of that position. The first full year of salary was secured through donations from two organizations.

#### Promotion

- How will you market or make available your Artifact to your intended audience/users?

Awareness and distribution will happen through denominational structure for the Church of the Nazarene, Africa West Field.

- What is your overall marketing strategy?

This device is one part of an overall strategic plan developed by the denomination called Vision 2020, which is to see an additional two million believers by the year 2020. This is largely driven by Jesus Film evangelistic efforts.

#### Standards of Publication

- What are the "standards of publication" particular to the chosen media genre?

Standards of publication for this headscarf are intended to appeal primarily to women who wear headscarves every day in West Africa. Different colors of ink

and cloth will be tested to see which are preferred by participants across the thirteen active countries.

- What is the rationale for your choices?

All of these decisions were guided by local West African church leadership.

### Action Plan

The “action plan” outlines how you will complete the Track 02 Artifact in a timely manner. The “action plan” considers three areas in preparation for completing the Artifact:

1. Identifying the various components of the Track 02 Artifact
  - Graphic artwork needed for Bible story images.
  - Cloth for printing the headscarves. This will be outsourced.
2. Identifying the technical skills required to complete the Artifact. This includes:
  - a. Identifying the specific skills necessary to develop the Artifact within the chosen medium
    - Specific skills needed to develop this Artifact include artistic drawing skills.
    - Understanding of StudyMaps to bring together the overall image.

Semiotic and cultural understanding of how the illustrations may be viewed.
  - b. Offering an assessment of the advisee's present skill-set.
    - The artistic ability was well within the skillset of the volunteer artist.
    - The understanding of StudyMaps is well within the skillset of the author.

- The cultural and semiotic awareness are shared between the author and the leadership in West Africa.

3. Developing a timeline. This includes:

- a. Outlining when and how the advisee will acquire the necessary skills (when applicable) to correct present deficiencies
- b. Setting deadlines for when the various components of the Track 02 Artifact will be completed
  - Original concept was shared with Nazarene denominational leadership in West Africa in Ghana and Togo during May and July, 2017.
  - Concept was adopted with a plan to develop locally created artwork to show twelve Bible stories selected from the Gospel of Luke. These are follow-up stories which would have been viewed while watching the Jesus Film.
  - July and August, 2017 were used for initial artist renderings.
  - September and October, 2017 these renderings were presented to denominational leadership across West Africa.
  - November 2017 plans began to formulate to acquire printing estimates and distribution channels at Training events.
  - December 2017 shows everything on schedule for January release to leaders from thirteen countries.
  - Assessments and evaluations will continue through the spring at various training events.

### Artifact 3 – Bible Story App, Low Orality Reliance, Semi-Literate



Figure # 44  
Bible Trekking Cover Page

#### Goals and Strategies

- What are the main goals for the Track 02 Artifact?

The main goals for this Artifact are to be:

1. To serve as a readily available communication device for those oral learners who are increasingly moving into working with technology.
2. To be a teaching and discussion guide for processing Bible stories. These stories, images and songs were created with new believers in mind.

- How will you test a “beta-version” of the Artifact and assess its success?
  1. A partner mission organization will assist in distribution of this Artifact throughout Africa via an extensive network they have developed over the last eleven years.
  5. Feedback will be primarily via the App itself.
- How will you measure the success of your Artifact?
 

Success will be measured by feedback received as well as numbers of downloads.
- How will you adequately maintain the finished product over the long-haul (of its life)?
 

Management of the Artifact will be the primary responsibility of the volunteer developer, Ronnie Matson. He has ideas about how to monetize this App for the continent.

#### Audience

- Who is the primary intended audience/user of your completed Artifact?
 

The primary audience are those church members who are oral preference learners by design or choice. They should be motivated by a desire to disciple new believers.
- What do you want the audience/user to do/think/experience after encountering your Artifact?
 

The App users will discover a new way to share with others from the convenience of their phone. They will experience a greater sense of participation in the life of the local and possibly, global church.

- What task will your audience/user be trying to accomplish wherein your Artifact might be utilized?

Evangelism and discipleship of new believers in a model easily reproducible by low literate and oral preference learners.

#### Artifact Scope and Content

- Define the scope of your Artifact. What will be the technical and content parameters for your Artifact?

An App developed for both Apple and Android operating systems.

- How will the content of your Artifact be organized?

3. Printed in color on cardstock and laminated.

4. The individual icons could be in jumbled order while on the bracelet. The bracelet could be disassembled and placed onto a table to illustrate the overall connections.

- What special technical or functional requirements are needed?

The only requirements are the Storyteller Trainer who first tells the stories while presenting the icons and keen listening ears and minds to retain the oral stories.

#### Budget

- What is the entire budget (line-item) for the Artifact?

App was designed by the author and programmed by a young volunteer from Uganda who lives in Kenya. The only money spent was one hundred USD to provide some internet access for the programmer.

- What hardware and software may be required to complete the Artifact?

Hardware was already in the possession of the programmer. Software needed was found via free downloads.

- Outsourcing fees?

None.

- Ongoing personnel/administrative support costs?

There may be a small charge for a future website to link user of the App.

#### Promotion

- The programmer is working on strategy for promotion and distribution through networks in which he participates.
- What is your overall marketing strategy?

Should he be able to develop a sustainable monetization model, that will fuel future growth and additional editions.

#### Standards of Publication

- What are the “standards of publication” particular to the chosen media genre?

The initial design was built from ideas more Western and or Bible based rather than cultural. This was deemed acceptable since the audience is primarily church based. In the world of technology, this is a ‘simple’ App and will likely remain so due to financial challenges of high end developing.

- What is the rationale for your choices?

Funding, purpose and target audience. The target audience is not driven by the latest technological advances as they are relatively new to internet based phones.

They also do not represent a significant source of income from advertising.

## Action Plan

The “action plan” outlines how you will complete the Track 02 Artifact in a timely manner. The “action plan” considers three areas in preparation for completing the Artifact:

1. Identifying the various components of the Track 02 Artifact.
  - Stories for new believers for which they could easily connect. Completed by the author.
  - Graphic images needed to tell the stories as well as some embedded lessons. Conceptualized and drawn by a volunteer.
  - Songs to support the same; while also presenting varied musical styles as an additional learning modality. Written, sung and recorded by volunteers.
  - Programming of App.
2. Identifying the technical skills required to complete the Artifact. This includes:
  - a. Graphic Artist.
    - i. Specific skills needed to develop this Artifact include artistic rendering and proficiency with software to digitize images.
    - ii. Semiotic and theological understanding to be able to assess each image for its intended meaning and purpose.
  - b. Musical Artist.
    - i. Ability to write lyrics, sing, play musical instruments sufficient for this project.
    - ii. Theological review for accuracy in lyrics.
  - c. Programmer.



- i. Ability to program an App in both Apple and Android platforms.
3. Developing a timeline. This includes:
  - a. Outlining when and how the advisee will acquire the necessary skills (when applicable) to correct present deficiencies.
  - b. Setting deadlines for when the various components of the Track 02 Artifact will be completed.



- The App was amazingly brought together in various pieces over a period of time, which suddenly fell in place during the summer of 2017.
- Programming has been completed during the fall of 2017.

## **Addendum**

### **Applied to an Artifact**

An example of applying this process is demonstrated here by looking at a project developed by a large denomination. Believing that the potential for this overall image is powerful, it led to the adoption of this project as a Tier One Artifact. What is shared here are the more detailed steps involved in evaluating, modifying, testing and reforming the images into a better delivery model for oral learners. The General Editor commissioned iconic images which would represent each of the sixteen key doctrines or Articles of Faith. The images were simply designed for visually communicating each basic belief. Students of semiotics may be drawn to the icons and their overall presentation, which was in the form of a cross, as shown below. According to Polanyi, these are the primary denotations.



Figure 39:  
Essentials Icons Original

A simple test could be administered even now for the reader. Consider each image in the overall form of the cross. If you were to assign a doctrine based title for each, what would they be? To better understand the fluid nature of images and their connection to matters of faith, fact or fiction, please take a moment to jot down your best guess for each icon.

How did you do? Did you struggle to know what was intended with any of the images? Could you imagine attempting this exercise if you could not read? The following

images are titled, so you can check your work. Are you surprised or perplexed by any of the icons and their intended meanings?

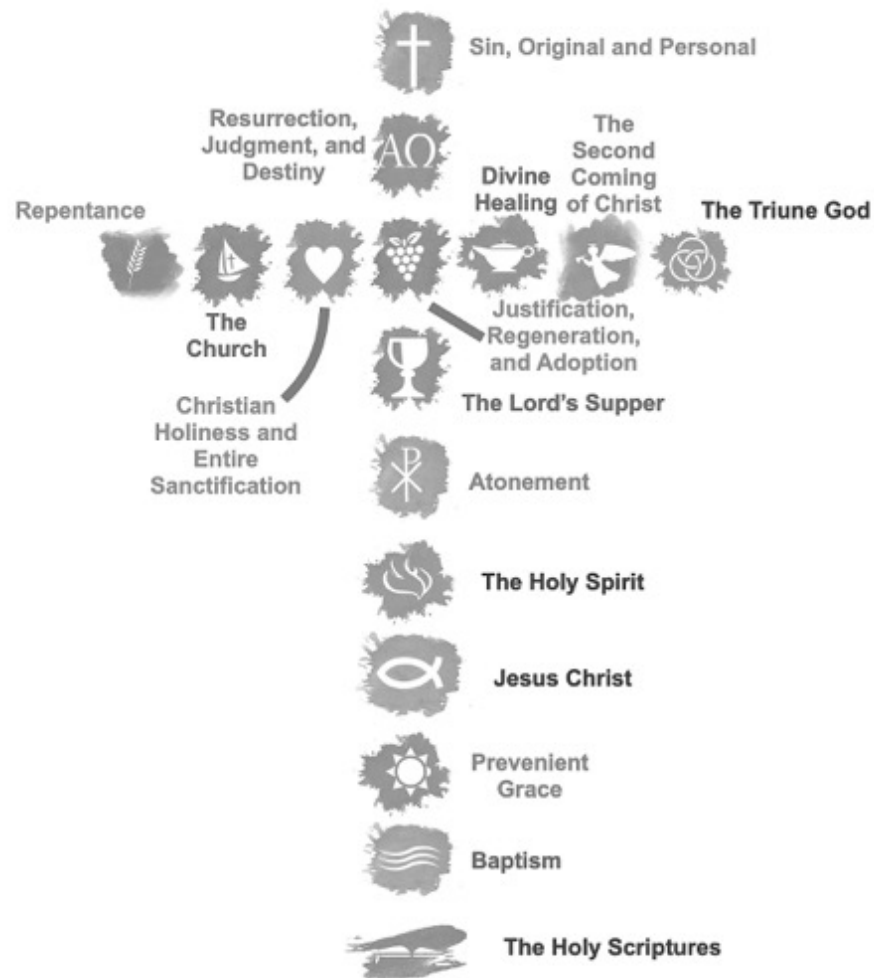


Figure 40:  
Essentials Icons Named

The General Editor offered the following explanations for the selected images.

Icons for Articles of Faith<sup>206</sup>

	<i>Icon</i>	<i>Article</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
1	Three concentric circles	Triune God	Represents the holy Trinity
2	Fish	Jesus Christ	Early church icon for a Christian/Represents Christ
3	Dove	Holy Spirit	Biblical symbol (Church logo)
4	Bible	Holy Scripture	Symbol of Scripture (Church logo)
5	Cross	Sin, original & personal	Symbolizes remedy for sin
6	Chi Rho	Atonement	First two letters of “Christ” in Greek; symbolizes the power of Christ over death
7	Sun	Prevenient Grace	Symbolizes the light the Holy Spirit sheds in sinners’ hearts to convict of sin
8	Strand of wheat	Repentance	The grain of wheat dies before rebirth
9	Cluster of grapes	Justification, Regeneration, & Adoption	Symbol of abundant new life in Numbers 13:23-24
10	White heart	Christian Holiness & Entire Sanctification	Clean, pure heart of love
11	Boat with cross	The Church	Early church symbol of the Christian church (boat carries believers to heaven)
12	Flowing water	Baptism	Biblical symbol of water grave & washing sins away

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<sup>206</sup> Frank Moore, ed., *Nazarene Essentials* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Pub. House, 2015), 41-49.

13	Cup	Lord's Supper	Biblical symbol of juice
14	Oil vessel	Divine Healing	Biblical symbol for healing
15	Angel	Second Coming of Christ	Biblical symbol of trumpet being sounded for Christ's return
16	Alpha & Omega	Resurrection, Judgment, & Destiny	First & last letters of Greek alphabet; biblical language of God being everlasting

The second step in Polanyi's three stage process is reorganization. My practice and field of study among oral learners causes me to view the overall as well as the particulars of the image. In doing so, I discovered some elements which would not be readily understood by non-lettered oral learners. Here is the list again, noting those icons which exhibit challenges oral learners would inherently face in seeking adequate natural comprehension. In each case of suggested changes, the goal would be to seek images drawn from biblical narratives, which develop a more transferable concept for oral learners who likely have only the Scriptures as a resource and is certainly, their primary resource.

#### Icons for Articles of Faith<sup>207</sup>

	<i>Icon</i>	<i>Article</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
2	Fish	Jesus Christ	Early church icon for a Christian/Represents Christ

Early church history makes a strong case for the use of the fish symbol so it is a logical choice. However, for oral learners not familiar with extra biblical information such as this history is to them, a better choice would be an image which they could more

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 41-49.

readily relate to from stories included in the Bible. The use of a loaf of bread comes from the narratives of Jesus as the Bread of Life.

6	Chi Rho	Atonement	First two letters of “Christ” in Greek; symbolizes the power of Christ over death
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Oral learners are by nature non-lettered people. Any reference to letters are at a minimum, not natural to them. References to a language used during biblical times has no bearing in their experience or knowledge database. An image from the biblical narratives which would be more readily recognized and would connect in many of the agrarian societies where oral learners are still prevalent would be the Lamb.

7	Sun	Prevenient Grace	Symbolizes the light the Holy Spirit sheds in sinners’ hearts to convict of sin
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While the image of the sun works, the more natural explanation for Prevenient Grace for oral learners would be to include the narrative of God giving the sun and rain to the righteous and the unrighteous.

8	Strand of wheat	Repentance	The grain of wheat dies before rebirth
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The strand of wheat can be combined with a narrative and thus impute a meaning into its use as an icon. A more natural icon which readily connects to the understanding of personal responsibility is seen in the natural action and response of prayer, which may be as close to a universal image as any of the icons.

9 in	Cluster of grapes	Justification, Regeneration, & Adoption	Symbol of abundant new life in Numbers 13:23-24
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The icon of the grapes is connected to a narrative and one that would be attractive to oral learners. However, informal tests conducted in four countries revealed that a more natural icon, as suggested by oral-visual learners, was that of a broken chain or open shackles.

11	Boat with cross	The Church	Early church symbol of the Christian church (boat carries believers to heaven)
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In world areas where large bodies of water are common, the boat icon is acceptable and welcome for its connection with Jesus and the disciples, the first members of this new church. The lessons learned from such narratives help support the concepts of people experiencing life together, ‘in the same boat.’ However, in arid, non-coastal areas such as the desert of the Sahel in Northern Africa and mountainous geography, the boat icon loses its meaning. One example is Burkina Faso, where there are no bodies of water. They have no idea what it is like to be on a boat. However, they are very familiar with wind. For such reasons, it would be advisable to have local leaders select an image which would express the concepts of togetherness. One such suggestion for many parts of Africa would be a group of people gathered under a large protective tree. Indeed, that is often the first practice and a common demonstration of local churches.

15	Angel	Second Coming of Christ	Biblical symbol of trumpet being sounded for Christ’s return
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Images of angels are challenging to develop in such a way that they reflect cultural as well as biblical reflections of these beings. While certainly present in both styles of narratives, their various forms reveal a potpourri of mixed images as well as



implied meanings. Not all images of angels are considered positive or beneficial. While the icon of a trumpet may not represent a universal image, it is recommended as an attempt to reduce the strong cultural associations in many cultures. The trumpet, rather than the angel becomes the symbol of the return of Christ, which is also more appropriate for oral learners as it is an aural or sound based icon.

16	Alpha & Omega	Resurrection, Judgment, & Destiny	First & last letters of Greek alphabet; biblical language of God being everlasting
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These letters reflect the same struggle for non-lettered peoples as did the Chi Rho in number six. While these letters are mentioned in Scripture, they are not familiar as symbols for oral learners whose knowledge is not script based. The icon of the weighing scales was recommended by oral-visual learners as something they understood and was present in their cultural knowledge base and practices.

A further step of reorganization is required. These images should be replaced with those which would be more clearly understood by oral communicators. A more detailed inspection of the order of the original icons reveals that their placement was random. This placement, or referential positioning<sup>208</sup> did not tell a story, at least not one which was logical or easily remembered. The order and presentation of the icons can be intentionally ordered to help locate them within an overall narrative and lock them into the memory. To this end, the less oral friendly images were identified and replaced as seen below:

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<sup>208</sup> Stéphane Tibi, "What is a StudyMap?" May 2008, accessed June 8, 2015, 3, <http://studymaps.org/files/pdfs/WhatIsaStudyMapNew.pdf>.



Figure 41:  
Essentials Icons Edited Order

Working from the outsides, inward, each four of one color help to tell the overall story, sequentially. This also divided the icons into ‘chunks,’ making them easier to remember as they were now not sixteen separate and individual images. Rather, they are now four sets of four, which makes them easier to recall. Oakley explains that as each chunk of four items are learned together, they become in essence a coil, which is now stored as a single item.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Barbara A. Oakley, *A Mind for Numbers: How to Excel at Math and Science (Even if You Flunked Algebra)* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2014), 64.

A further step in reorganization was to correct some of the troublesome images with images which would communicate more clearly. The following figure shows the last remake; color-coded, repositioned, and with the more literate images replaced.

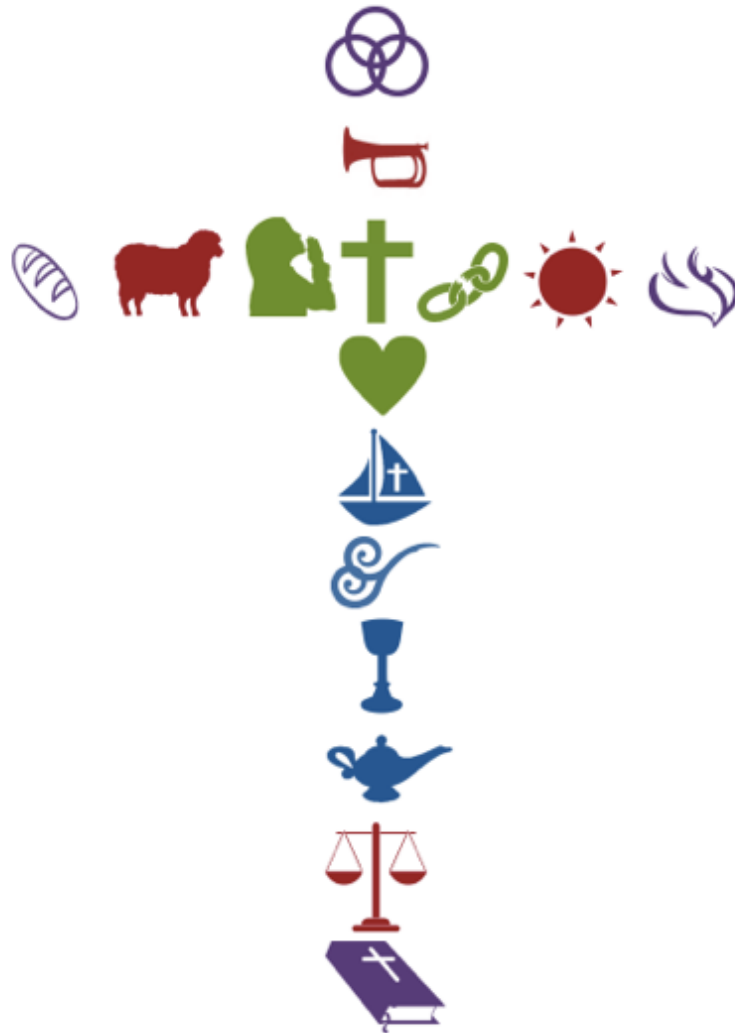


Figure 42:  
Essentials Icons New Design

In the final image, there now exists a story and a storyline. Beginning from the four purple icons at each end of the cross, the story moves from identifying those elements which are part of God's Foundation, which He provided for us. The next four just inside those are indicated by a color change to red and tell of God's Path for people

to follow. Continuing to work inward and focusing on the center of the cross are the four green icons, which tell of the Choices in our Personal Journey. The final four icons are the blue which tell of our participation and growth as disciples and followers of Jesus Christ. Each of these adaptations is specifically designed to assist oral learners who cannot rely on written explanations.

The third step of Polanyi's process is to 'Learn from the Results.' The first exposure of this model to denominational leaders in Cote d'Ivoire, West Africa was very well received. Representatives were present from the Francophone countries of Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo and Niger. Several expressed their gratitude for Orality training as it really is the only option for many of the people they work with in each of these countries. While discussing ways to promote longer lists of Bible stories, the icons shown above were introduced, explaining the purpose of the overall image and the connections to forty-four accompanying biblical narratives. There was immediate heartfelt reception for the idea as they instantly knew it would be valuable for the oral learners they minister among. The addition of such images with stories immediately enabled them to see that this would be reproducible in their communities. Other leaders across the continent of Africa have concurred with these initial observations after having taken the image test themselves and realizing that there were confusing choices in some of the icons.

The final revision above reveals one change which was suggested, which was to remove the backgrounds and make the images themselves more prominent. An additional factor was to remove the 'paint splatter' backgrounds. While these are stylish and attractive in western culture, the 'paint splatters' can confuse the intended purpose of the image and complicate clearer communication. This was discussed and encouraged as a

possible use of these icons will be on plastic band bracelets. The bracelets limit the size of the icon so it was felt that the images by themselves would be clearer without the backgrounds. Another mnemonic device was added, as a communication tool for the oral learners to remember the three questions they wish to use when discussed the Bible stories. The leadership had been discussing a mechanism for discussing Bible stories that could also be a tool for intentional discipleship. They determined to use the questions as follows:

- What do the disciples HEAR in the story?
- What do the disciples SEE in the story?
- What are the disciples DOING in the story?

After discussion on observations which people are discovering themselves, they would move into a time of application, revisiting the same questions, now personalized for themselves rather than the people in the story.

- What do WE HEAR in the story?
- What do WE SEE in the story?
- What will WE DO from this story?

It was an easy and logical addition to add visual cues for those questions, which are shown below. The leadership believed that this overall image with its sixteen smaller icons for the stories and three image cues for the questions would be very effective in presenting the set of Bible stories to their oral learners.

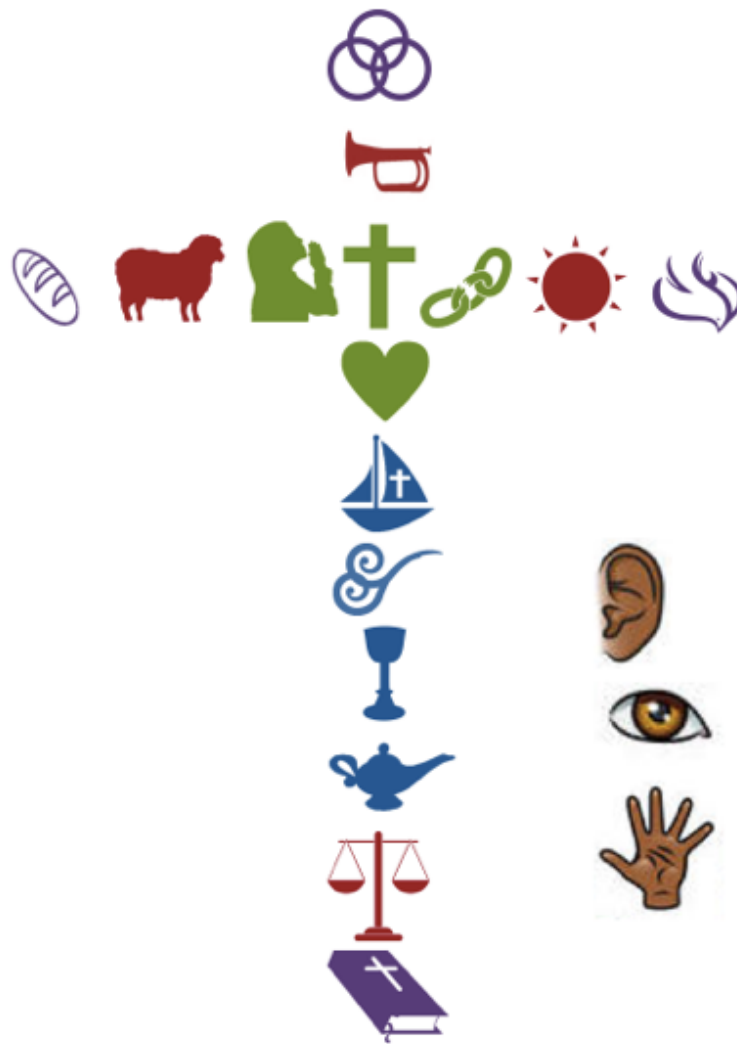


Figure 43:  
Essentials Icons with Questions

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